Interrogating Tweendom Online: 'Fangirl as Pathology', Gender/Age, and *iCarly* Fandom

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, fan studies has sought to counter perceptions of the 'pathology of fandom' and the devaluation of fans as feminine and infantile. In recent years, some scholars have claimed that fans are newly normalised in popular culture, and it is no longer necessary to contest problematic or pathologising stereotypes of fans. However, the near-exclusive stereotyped representation of 'hysterical' crowds of adolescent female fans, and the routine dismissal of 'fangirls' in mainstream media and fandom itself, would indicate that not all fans have escaped pathologisation. It is also the case that not all fans have enjoyed equal levels of academic attention. By virtue of their age and gender, girl fans arguably carry the greatest burden of negative stereotyping. Yet they have been notably marginalised in fan studies scholarship and their stereotyped construction has remained largely unchallenged.

This thesis seeks to address this imbalance as it offers a timely examination of the cultural construction, circulation and pleasures of fangirl fandom, seeking to challenge and expose the tenacity of what I refer to as, 'fangirl as pathology'. Using *iCarly* (2007-2012) fans across three online fan spaces (LiveJournal, Blogspot, and Tumblr) as a case study, it presents an empirical, observational study that aims to further understand the implications of the cultural construction and negative stereotypes of girl fans, and the extent to which they come to shape the landscape of tween TV fandom, or 'tweendom'.

Combining fan studies and girls' studies, and analysing girls' fan culture from an intersectional, gender/age perspective, this thesis examines the ways in which fangirl identities are performed and the 'fangirl' label is negotiated, and how fans identify with *iCarly* in relation to their own gendered/generational subjectivities. Strategies of defence and legitimisation are considered within the contexts of hierarchical distinctions in inter-/intra-fandom, how fans are textually represented within the show, and online interactions with the series' creator-producer. This thesis argues that fandom performs important functions for these young women. As active producers, consumers, and *negotiators* of media, girl fans' reproduction of negative and pathologising discourses of fangirls demand reconsideration outside resistance/conformist binaries, and specifically in the context of their stigmatisation and structural age/gender inequalities.

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Glossary

Affect: In concept and definition, 'affect' is "ever-expanding", and often used interchangeably with emotion (Duffett 2013, 137). I use 'affect' to indicate a (non-conscious) experience of 'emotional intensity' which drives individuals to express themselves or behave in particular ways (ibid, 136-8; Shouse 2005).

Affirmational Fandom: In affirmational fandom, usually official or 'producerly' spaces, "the source material is re-stated" rather than transformed through fanworks and the creator is "in charge", attributed the last word on their own creations (obsession_inc 2009, n.p).

Fan Symbolic Capital: Fan reputation. Hills (2002) defines symbolic capital as "both a form of recognition (fame, accumulated prestige) and the specific 'legitimation' of other conjunctions of capitals which are themselves 'known and recognised as self-evident'" (Bourdieu 1991 cited in Hills 2002, 57).

Fan Wank: Wank can refer to contemptible or disagreeable fannish behaviour, but it is also used to refer to general fan-created drama, heated arguments, and ship wars.

Feels: The term originated on 4Chan. 'Feels' are defined by Mithen (2014) as feelings related specifically to the experience of fannish pleasure, commonly understood as feelings linked to a fictional artifact and "qualitatively different" from 'feelings' in terms of "day to day" emotions of happiness and sorrow (n.p). While this is largely the case, the experience of 'having feels' may not be entirely divorced from feelings related to one's lived experiences if the fannish object functions as a 'symbolic resource' (Zittoun 2006): see Chapter Four, p.236.

Fourth Wall: The invisible boundary that shields fans and fan works from the gaze of 'the powers that be' (TPTB; see below).

Gateway fandom: A fandom consisting of new (usually younger) fans (see: Hills 2012, 123).

Gift Economy: A system whereby fanworks are 'gifted' rather than sold, made openly and freely available without any explicit or formalised agreement that anything be given in return. Fanfiction is one of the most widely circulated works in a gift economy and is thus closely tied to primarily female fandom or fangirl modes of fandom (see: Hellekson 2009; Kollock 1999; Pearson 2007; Sabotini 1999).

'Hysterical': Originally defined as a neurotic condition particular to women, 'hysterical' is not only gendered in its etymology but also pathologises female sexuality (see: Busse 2013; Krischer 2015; Showalter 1993). Historically, the term has been used to silence women, and while problematically 'feminising' emotion, an accusation of 'hysteria' may be levied to discount a person's feelings or emotions. Considering the history of the term and its abelist connotations I therefore place it in inverted commas throughout (the same is applied to the word 'crazy').

iCarly/**fandom:** To denote both the TV show and the fan community.

Inter-fandom/Intra-fandom: Inter-fandom is used to refer to fans *between* or *among* different spaces (i.e. GS - Twitter) and intra-fandom to refer to fans *within* the same space.

Keysmashing: Also known as 'keyboard smashing'. Can be understood as a form of aposiopesis for the digital age; a rhetorical device whereby speech is suddenly broken off as a way of coping with the unsayable.

Mary Sue: Often used as a derogatory term primarily in fan fiction circles. Mary Sue is an idealised vision of 'femininity' an unrealistic female character; universally adored, pliant, 'nice', good at everything.

Metafiction: A literary device that draws attention to its own status as fictional artifact. "Metafiction forces the reader to examine their relationship with the text and the outside world and the reader of metafiction is made explicitly aware of this mediation by the text itself." (McGinn 2010, n.p).

OTP: Abbreviation for 'one true pairing' used to refer to a fan's primary pairing or ship.

PearPad: In the Schneiderverse (see below), characters own Pear products, a parody of Apple. These are often exaggerated, thus a PearPad (iPad) is 2ft long and a PearPhone is shaped as a pear.

Picspam: A collection of screencaps from a specific episode usually narrated with humorous fannish commentary.

Schneiderverse: The fictional universe in which all shows created by Dan Schneider co-exist.

'Shade': To 'throw shade' is to judge or insult someone subtly or indirectly.

Ship: To 'ship' is to support a particular romantic pairing.

TPTB: Shorthand for 'The Powers that Be', it may refer to writers, directors, producers, and actors or those with creative/legal control over the object.

Transformational Fandom: obsession_inc (2009) defines transformational fandom as a female-dominated community that is predominantly concerned with 'transforming' the source text through their fanworks (e.g. fanfiction).

Introduction:
Countering 'Fangirl as Pathology'

Given the sheer persistence of media images depicting 'hysterical' crowds of adolescent female fans (over the last 50 years or more), the stereotype of the fangirl[1] is not difficult to visualise. Indeed, such images have made the concept of the 'fan' near synonymous with the emotional, obsessed, and immature fangirl, and consolidated the negative and pathological stereotype of fans more broadly (Hills 2005a; Jenkins 1992). Due to the historical over-association of fandom with female adolescence (Hills 2005b), and the 'pathology of fandom' model constructing fans as female (Scheiner 2000), fans, regardless of age and gender, have long been (and continue to be) stereotyped and devalued as feminised and infantile via their close engagement with, and deep investments in, popular culture (Cline 1992; Jenkins 1992; Jensen 1992; Johnson 2007a; Stanfill 2013). In addition, fan activities are similarly further trivialised and delegitimised through their infantilism/feminisation (Driscoll 2006; Scheiner 2000).

Since the early 1990s, fan studies has sought to counter perceptions of the pathology of fandom and the construction of fans as (negatively) feminine and immature. Yet, such stereotypes have been contested predominantly in relation to male and adult female fans; such fans often define themselves against these stereotypes, and are (more) able to escape pathology as precisely *not* young girls. In creating a distance from these stereotypes within academic studies of fandom, young female fans have been left floating in pathology, their status yet to be rehabilitated and their construction largely unchallenged. This has the unfortunate consequence of implying that the stereotypes which devalue fans are only invalid when applied to those who are *not* both young and female, that girl fans really are no more than the hormone-riddled, mindless consumers that they are constructed as, and that they do not 'do' fandom in the same, 'authentic', or 'correct' ways as their older and/or male counterparts to therefore warrant academic attention. At the same time, the kinds of fan objects commonly associated with young women are also underrepresented in academic work on fandom. By virtue of their very age and gender, teenage girls appear to most easily

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[1] The word 'fangirl' was first recorded in 1934 in a novel called *Holy Deadlock* by A. P. Herbert (Tearle 2013). While 'Fanboy' was added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in 2008, 'fangirl' was not added until 2014.

fit the negative fan stereotype (distilled in popular media representations and perpetuated within fandom itself), and hence distancing themselves from it is especially fraught. Given the ubiquitous nature of fangirls' dismissal and the inherent difficulties in escaping negative stereotyping, fangirls' relative invisibility as a subject of fan studies scholarship demands interrogation and challenge.

Despite the supposed 'mainstreaming' of fan culture, the routine pathologisation of fangirls, and dismissal of their fannish objects, shows little sign of abating. However, the tenacity of, what could be described as '*fangirl* as pathology', has yet to be challenged with the academic fervour that characterised the first wave of fan studies' objection to 'fandom as pathology' (Jensen 1992). This thesis thus offers a timely examination of the cultural construction, circulation, and pleasures of fangirl fandom, seeking to challenge and expose the tenacity of 'fangirl as pathology'. Using *iCarly* (2007-2012) fans as a case study, it presents an empirical study of three online fan spaces which aims to further understand the implications of the cultural construction and negative stereotypes of girl fans, and the extent to which they come to shape the landscape of young female fandom. In the following study, *iCarly* fandom is used to ask questions regarding tween TV fandom, or what I refer to as 'tweendom'; a space in which gendered/generational distinctions may be particularly urgent, given the distinctly young and female target demographic of the series. A study of this nature is crucial, I argue, if we are to begin to understand the impact of fangirls' relentlessly pathologised representations in media culture, the "ambivalent pleasures" (Nash and Lahti 1999, 83) of fandom for those dismissed as fangirls, and the continued inequalities experienced by young women in fandom.

Four key and interrelated questions are addressed in this thesis. Firstly, I seek to explore the ways in which fangirls defend and legitimise their culture and their pleasures in the face of their devaluation and pathologised representations. Defence and legitimisation strategies and their implications are considered in the context of fan-fan interactions and fangirls' (pre-)existing awareness of their devalued status, but I also examine the further complexities that arise in the context of their online interactions with the series' creator-producer. Secondly, I consider how fans negotiate fangirl stereotypes and with what implications. These include the construction and negotiation of the 'fangirl' label in the context of boundary maintenance and inter-

/intra-fandom policing, hierarchical distinctions, and the pathologisation of the self and other/Other. My third question relates to 'fangirl' as a performative gendered fan identity, shedding light on the various ways fangirl identities are claimed, performed, and dismissed, and examines how dis/identification functions in the context of *iCarly* fandom. Fourth, and finally, I question how fans identify with a tween show in relation to their own gendered/generational subjectivities, growing up, and their lived experiences. Focusing on fans' readings of, and pleasures in the text, their 'personal experience narratives' (Cavicchi 1998), and emotional attachments to *iCarly*/fandom, I consider the important functions fandom can perform with regard to youth identity construction and development. Forging a dialogue between fan studies and girls' studies, this thesis analyses fandom from a gender/age perspective, accounting for an intersectional identity under-researched in the field of fan studies. It argues not only for the importance of studying this gendered generational fan demographic, but seeks to illustrate the ways in which the central concerns that have shaped the field of fan studies have functioned to systematically make absent young female fans and the fannish objects associated with them.

Drawing upon a range of interdisciplinary frameworks and taking a multi-sited approach to fan analysis, my research is based on non-participatory observation of *iCarly* fans on three internet platforms: The Groovy Smoothie (GS), the largest LiveJournal community dedicated to the series; DanWarp Blogspot (BS), the message board for fans on the official website of the series' creator-producer, Dan Schneider; and Tumblr, one of—if not the—most currently popular social media platforms which fans use to perform their fandom and communicate with each other. Examining *iCarly* fandom across three sites allows for a more complex insight into the construction, pleasures, and circulation of young female fandom and the ways in which fangirl identities are performed and the label itself negotiated. Nonetheless, by no means are the analyses exhaustive, and nor does this thesis aim to make universal claims about fangirls and young female fandom.

Given my concern with the ways in which fangirls defend and legitimise their culture in the context of their unequal and devalued status *as* fangirls, and the extent to which these discourses come to shape 'naturally occurring' fan talk, intervening in fan spaces was unsuitable for this project. Moreover, although I began my research while

the show was still running, it was only in its infancy when the finale aired, by which point the fan communities had become mostly inactive, if they were not already. Accordingly, an ethnographic approach and participatory observation was particularly difficult, if not unfeasible. The case study chapters are thus based upon a combination of a constant comparative analysis and a discourse analysis of archived online interactions between fans (and the producer) in the three spaces. In what follows I will briefly outline the intellectual context in which this study is located and the interventions it makes into fan scholarship specifically.

Intervening in Fan Studies

Although gender has long been an important concern in fan studies, intersectional identities have garnered far less attention. Work that considers the intersection of age and gender has begun to emerge, yet much of this considers older female fans (Anderson 2012; Scodari 1998; 2014; Vroomen 2002), and rarely has this extended to girls and young women. Studying fandom across the life course, and fandom among older adults in particular, Harrington and Bielby (2010a) suggest that "the centrality of fandom in (pre-) adolescent explorations of gender identity and romantic/sexual fantasy has been well documented" (432) and proceed to cite four notably dated studies; one which considers cinema-goers in the 1930s (Kuhn 2002), another in the 1940s (Williams 1980), and two which consider music fandom (Ehrenreich et al. 1992; Frith 1990). The authors then state that "scholarly interest in teen fandom continues" (ibid), yet they cite only one recent study—a tween audience reception study of Britney Spears (Lowe 2004). Thus, again, the citations offered by Harrington and Bielby are insufficient in illustrating their point that adolescent fans are well researched. Moreover, like the previous citations, Lowe's study is focused on girls and music (if not celebrity), and nor is it specifically concerned with fans or fandom. Pointing this out is not to diminish the importance of the work they cite, but to highlight the fact that the centrality of fandom in the lives of contemporary adolescents is far from well documented, and scholarly interest in teen fandom remains somewhat scarce.

As I have suggested above, young fans and girls in particular, have been much discussed in relation to pop music (Baker 2001; 2003; 2004; Ehrenreich et al. 1992;

Herrmann 2008; Lemish 1998). To a lesser extent, there has been consideration of girl fans and male stars (Karniol 2001; Mazzarella 2005b; Nash and Lahti 1999; Raviv et al. 1995), and work on young fanfiction writers/readers has begun to emerge (Black 2008; Kohnen 2008; Korobkova and Black 2014; Thomas 2006; Tosenberger 2008; Warburton 2010), yet not all of this work draws on fan studies frameworks. To date, in-depth analyses of 'gateway fandoms', the meanings of fandom for first-time fans, and a wide variety of fan practices enacted by young fans are somewhat lacking in fan studies. Concern with a diverse array of fannish objects favoured by young people is also limited in the field. In recent years, with the phenomenal success of the book and film franchise, there has been a flurry of scholarship that has focused on teen girls and *Twilight* fandom, with several edited collections and numerous articles (Becque 2012; Bode 2010; Click 2009; Click et al. 2010; Driscoll 2012; Hills 2012; Kalviknes and Williams 2010; Morey 2012b; Pinkowitz 2011). Given "the burden of representation that accompanies *Twilight* fangirls' unparalleled visibility in contemporary fan culture" (Scott 2011, 81), to the extent that, for Suzanne Scott, "the term 'fangirl' in its contemporary use is defined almost exclusively through *Twilight* fandom" (80), this work is crucial. However, there is a vast world of other media objects favoured by fangirls and an abundance of fandoms populated by girl fans that are *not Twilight* and equally warrant academic attention.

Engagement with teen fandom and television, and especially outside commercial or official spaces[2] is much needed in fan studies in order to challenge both the traditional association of (young) femininity with passivity and conformity, and the casting of young people as vulnerable to the power of the media.[3] Corporate attempts to control and/or constrain fandom are not exclusive to teen fandoms; the media acts to produce fandom across genres (Jancovich and Hunt 2004). Yet, teen fandoms are predominantly studied within the incorporation side of the 'incorporation/resistance paradigm' (Scott 2011), with little work on the resistance side (i.e. fan spaces originating from 'grassroots') to present a more nuanced picture, and nor is it much complicated by considering how fans' negotiate incorporation.

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[2] See: Brooker (2001); Hills (2004); Stein (2011).
[3] Exceptions include: Booth (2008); Gillan (2008); Kohnen (2008).

Similarly, with only a few exceptions,[4] there is an absence of scholarship that examines how fangirls respond to, and negotiate, the persistent negative stereotypes that inform their widespread discrimination and pathologised representations in both popular media and fan culture itself. Given the potency of such stereotypes, and the frequency with which 'fangirl' is levied as an insult in fan spaces, it seems crucial to examine how girls themselves manage the tensions inherent in their position as fans. This is only a brief acknowledgement of the gaps that I have identified in existing fan scholarship as it pertains to my research and will be expanded on in Chapter One. What follows is a brief introduction to *iCarly,* the tween, and 'tweendom'.

Tween

The phenomenon of the tween has garnered considerable attention within the media and in the wider public conscious but has been under-researched in academia (Kennedy 2012; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005).[5] The definition of the tween is somewhat contentious as there is very little agreement as to the specific age boundaries it refers to. Tweens are thought to be anywhere from 8-14 (Tally 2005), although this media-driven consumer category (Cook and Kaiser 2004) may also be divided into two segments: emerging tweens aged 8-10 and transitioning tweens aged 11-12 (Siegel et al. 2001). While the number of years the tween age covers overall is relatively small, sizeable developmental changes occur within this time span; as Siegel et al. (2001) highlight, "a 12 year old has experienced 50 percent more in life than an 8 year old" (3) and thus, a division within this category may be productive. Crucially, the tween is also a particularly gendered category (Kennedy 2012; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005), with much of the media output aimed specifically at young girls.

Over the last decade, media aimed at tween girls has increased immensely, carving out the tween as a distinct consumer demographic. Much of tween media centres around tween audiences' consumption of celebrity (Kennedy 2012), and caters to their supposed desires to *be* celebrity performers themselves (Allen 2011; Lumby 2007; Martin 2010; Uhls and Greenfield 2011a; 2011b; 2013). For example, Disney's

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[4] See: Healey (2009); Nash and Lahti (1999); Williams (2011a); Zubernis and Larsen (2012).
[5] Existing research has tended to focus on tweens' construction as a market category (Willett 2005) or discursive/textual analysis of tween texts (Blue 2013; Kennedy 2012; Tally 2005).

Hannah Montana (2006-2011) focuses on an average schoolgirl who leads a double life, secretly moonlighting as a famous popstar, Nickelodeon's *Victorious* (2010-2013) follows an aspiring singer navigating life at a Hollywood-based performing arts school, Disney's *Liv and Maddie* (2014-) revolves around a set of twin girls, one of whom has returned home to her family after four years as a Hollywood actress, and of course, *iCarly* with its central characters finding their fame on the internet.

Introducing *iCarly*

Premiering on the children's network Nickelodeon in September 2007, *iCarly* was created by Nickelodeon veteran Dan Schneider, popularly known for *Kenan and Kel* (1996-2000), *Drake and Josh* (2004-2007) and the aforementioned *Victorious*, to name just a few of his sitcom creations. The sitcom follows tween-girl Carly Shay who lives with her older brother and legal guardian Spencer, a sculptor artist, in a loft-apartment in Seattle. Together with her best-friend 'tomboy' Sam, and her neighbour 'tech-geek' Freddie, the trio produce their own successful webshow, iCarly,[6] and inadvertently become internet celebrities. Although episodes revolve, to varying degrees, around the production of the webshow that they broadcast directly from a makeshift studio in Carly's loft, and virtually all episodes feature webshow segments, it was the increasingly mature humour and pervasive sexual innuendo, and the character relationships ('ships') that fans appeared most invested in. Indeed, the internet fan base was hugely divided between the Seddie (Sam and Freddie), and Creddie (Carly and Freddie) ships; a shipping 'war' that was simultaneously encouraged and condemned by Schneider who repeatedly teased each side and pitted them against each other during the show's five year-run. In certain corners of *iCarly* fandom, Cam, the femslash pairing of Sam and Carly, and Spam, the (age-difference) pairing of Spencer and Sam, were also popular.

Tween sitcoms, like *iCarly*, are usually populated by characters on the cusp of adolescence (the upper-end of the tween years) and, if the series is successful enough to continue, are firmly teen-aged by the end of the show's run. The *iCarly* trio age from 13-18 over the course of the series, although they remain relatively infantalised

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[6] iCarly the fictional webshow will not be italicised in order to differentiate from *iCarly* the TV sitcom.

across the seasons[7] in keeping with the shows' TV-Y7 (children age 7 and above) and then TV-G ratings (generally suitable for all ages).[8] Although targeted at tweens and teens, *iCarly* was popular across generations (Barney 2012), and the university age demographic in particular. After all, the target audience is an 'assumed' or 'imagined' audience, "a fiction that serves the needs of an imagining institution… there is no actual audience that lies beyond its production as a category…as representations" (Hartley 2003, 105).[9] Testament to its cross-generational popularity, by its final season in 2012 *iCarly* had become one of the highest-rated shows on basic cable (Huff 2009), with audiences reaching 12.4 million at its peak (Barney 2012).

Studying *iCarly* and Tweendom

While *iCarly* attracted a fair amount of press coverage, academic attention has been comparatively limited. In the context of a broader analysis of contemporary teen culture and the relationship between TV and pop music, Doyle Greene (2012) analysed *iCarly* in terms of girl power and neoliberal ideologies, and the series' "highly problematic and interrelated political negotiations" (8) around a number of issues, including gender roles. In the long out-dated (but still on-going) spirit of analysing children's media in terms of media effects, Kristen Myers (2013) analysed *iCarly* in a markedly reductive manner, in terms of the "anti-feminist messages'' that are positioned as "virtually inescapable for viewers" (203) (see Chapter Four). In another article, Myers (2012) analysed the show in relation to its reinscription of hegemonic masculinity through the mediated "messages" which it communicates to children. More productively, Ethan Thompson (2008) discussed *iCarly* as a successful "convergence comedy", examining its strategies to invite viewers into "the series architecture via Web 2.0" (n.p). Building on Thompson's article, in previous work, I have analysed the sitcoms' incorporation of digital/social technologies and transmedia storytelling techniques, its convergence with other Schneider shows in the 'Schneiderverse', and the potential enrichment of audiences' 'media experiences' via immersion in the official online spaces (Dare-Edwards 2014b).

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[7] The official number of seasons is debatable: ranging from five-seven on different websites. I identify episode numbers according to the fan-made *iCarly* Wikia available at: http://icarly.wikia.com/wiki/ICarly_Wiki.
[8] See: The TV Parental Guidelines at http://www.tvguidelines.org/ratings.htm.
[9] With regards to teen TV, age/genre, and intended/actual audience demographics, see: Ross and Stein (2008b).

Although *iCarly* is an interesting text in terms of its construction and convergence with internet technologies for example, this is not a study of the sitcom itself. My choice of *iCarly* does however allow me to consider how younger age interacts with gender in a fandom that is predominantly comprised of women under the age of 25, how an already stigmatised demographic negotiate their fandom for a culturally devalued object, and to take account for wider considerations between fandom, girlhood, and digital media than is evident in current scholarship. Although the fans I consider here are not tween, the study of tween fandom is novel, and thus to some extent responds to Ingvild Kvale Sørenssen and Claudia Mitchell's (2011) call within tween studies to "include the voice of the audience" (157).

My use of the term 'tweendom' is to specifically refer to tween-oriented media fandom across various internet platforms, and not the fans themselves. Tweendom was a term also used by some LiveJournal *iCarly* fans to refer to the collective and interconnected fandom(s) for Nickelodeon and Disney sitcoms focused on tween-age characters. Indeed, much tween media, including television, film, music, magazines, and indeed the tween stars themselves—both on and off-screen—is heavily intertextual, resembling a web of connections.

A Fangirl Dichotomy

While academic uses and definitions of the term 'fangirl' are outlined in Chapter One, here I wish to note the dichotomous nature of the term[10] as it is used in *iCarly* fandom. The following dual-definition is recurrent throughout the case study chapters and has necessarily shaped the way I have approached fans' negotiations of the label and coloured the analysis of fangirl performances. To capture the dichotomous usage of the term, it is useful to refer to one of the most popular definitions of 'fangirl' submitted to and voted by users on the online dictionary, *Urban Dictionary*:

> 1. (derogatory) a female fan, obsessed with something (or someone) to a frightening or sickening degree. Often considered ditzy, annoying and shallow.

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[10] See also: Healey (2009).

2. (playful, good-natured) less extreme, a female fan who can laugh at their
own passion for their particular interest (or even obsession).[11]

This dual-definition reflects the way in which 'fangirl' can be used both as a derogatory term and a playful term. In the derogatory sense, 'fangirl' pathologises the fan, their passion(s), and the performativity of their fannishness and highlights a lack of depth and intellect. Used in a playful, lightly self-deprecating way, the term 'fangirl' works to indicate that the fan is self-aware (if not self-policing) rather than mindlessly obsessed; cognisant of their devalued status and the usually unfavourable meanings of the term, they downplay their fandom to create distance from the 'frighteningly obsessed' fangirl, while simultaneously indicating their affective modes of behaviour and laying claim to a deep fannish investment. To varying extents, both definitions of fangirl can be seen operating in the three fan spaces I consider in this thesis. Broadly speaking, the term functions differently, is used for different purposes, and takes on varying meanings when claimed for the self or applied to others.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One traces the historical underpinnings and development of fan studies and its relationship to other disciplines including feminist audience studies and cultural studies. It considers the ways in which the conceptual themes and political purposes of fan studies have worked, thus far, to systematically make largely absent young female fans. More specifically, I propose that fan studies' focus on discourses of resistance, the near canonical rendering of so-called 'cult' texts, and long-held assumptions about girls' passivity and conformity have contributed to fangirls' marginalisation in academic accounts of fandom. Concurrently, this review of literature also works to account for the emergence of girls' studies and recent work on girls' media culture, girls as producers, and girls' use of the internet. In bringing together these two fields of study, I reveal the ways in which girls' studies has begun to challenge precisely the gendered and generational discourses, assumptions, and stereotypes about girls' media engagement that have contributed to girls' relative erasure in fan studies, and thus argue for their long overdue inclusion in the field. In the second part of the chapter I detail the methodological approaches taken in this thesis, my personal investment in

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[11] Stephemu, "fangirl", *Urban Dictionary,* 24 April, 2006,
http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fangirl. [Accessed 3/9/14].

the themes that underpin this research, and attend to the ethical concerns and decision-making processes involved in researching *iCarly* fan cultures.

Chapter Two explores the ways in which Groovy Smoothie (GS) fans discordantly negotiate, defend, and legitimise their fangirl culture and performance in light of negative cultural constructions of the fangirl, and in the presence of Schneider. Through a discussion of fans' reading practices and the interpretive strategies that shape their communal understandings of, and pleasures, in *iCarly*, I examine the performative nature of the fangirl identity and how self-identifying as a fangirl functioned in the early days of the community. In the context of Schneider's arrival at the GS, I explore fangirl shame and the ways in which fans aligned themselves with, invoked, and repurposed fangirl stereotypes as a defence strategy to protect themselves from outside judgement and, in inter-fandom, as a bid for elevated status, to distinguish their *iCarly* community from those outside LiveJournal. With a surge of 'newbies' (new members) following the producer, I examine intra-fandom distinctions, the restructuring of internal 'fangirl hierarchies' as existing members sought to legitimise and distance themselves from 'entitled', unsocialised 'newbie' fangirls, and the eventual breakdown of the community. This chapter illustrates some of the ways in which fangirl stereotypes become implicated in tensions and conflicts between fans, and reveals a complex set of negotiations involved in performing and claiming a fangirl identity whereby the dual-definition of 'fangirl' does not always easily map onto positive/self, negative/other.

In Chapter Three, I move from a consideration of the impact of the producer's presence in a fan space, to an investigation of fan/producer interactions on Schneider's Blogspot, an official 'producerly' space. Here I conduct a reader-guided textual analysis of the representation of fans in a controversial *iCarly* episode, and in accounting for fans' responses, I focus in particular on their vocal refusal to accept their pathologised and stereotypical representation. Within this I consider defence, legitimisation, and distinction strategies and the construction of a 'hierarchy of pathology' based on categories of appropriate fannish investment detailed in the episode and reiterated in Schneider's blog post. I propose that the fan representation and Schneider's response to criticism can be read as a disciplinary strategy intended for 'unruly' fans, and John Braithwaite's (1989) theory of reintegrative shaming is

used to examine the impact of the producer's strategies in terms of the extent to which the pathologised stereotypes distilled in the episode were affirmed, resisted, or taken up and applied by fans in relation to the self and other. Complementing this, Erving Goffman's (1963) theories of stigma allows for an examination of fangirls' strategies as stigmatised individuals in relation to their fellow stigmatised people and in the presence of a non-stigmatised individual (e.g. Schneider). This illustrates some of the difficulties in challenging the pathologisation of fangirls *as* fangirls, and thereby argues that what may be understood as girls' passivity and uncritical acceptance of their devaluation should be reconsidered in light of the disempowering stereotypes that are set to contain (if not mute) them as young female fans.

Marking a departure from spaces occupied by Schneider, Chapter Four moves to Tumblr to consider fangirl performances away from the producer's gaze. I conceptualise Tumblr blogs, or fannish corners of Tumblr, as a fangirl space akin to 'virtual bedroom' culture (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004) that facilitates flexible identity expression (Wang 2013a), self-disclosure and emotional self-expression (Stern 2002). Although in subtle ways, Tumblr fans continue to defend and justify their pleasures in a tween show, shame is largely displaced by the hyperbolic nature of fangirl language, communal articulations of affect, and the collective performance of fannish identity. Rather than distancing themselves from characteristics associated with the fangirl, I argue that the embodied performance of fangirl fandom seen commonly represented in media images is instead made visible on Tumblr through hyperbolic language. In examining the fangirl identity as linguistically performative, I introduce and develop the concept of 'mimetic language'. In exploring the ways mimetic language functions to express belonging to the community and emotional investment in the fan object, I consider that fans are finding power in emotional expression and resisting 'fangirl as pathology' by recuperating fangirl as a positive, even feminist act. I then attend to emotional investments and the affective dimensions of fandom through an examination of fans' self narratives, their reflections on their meaningful encounters with *iCarly*, and their fannish trajectories from becoming a fan to preparing to bid farewell to the show as it approaches its final episode. In exploring 'becoming-a-fan stories' (Cavicchi 1998), I examine in what ways fans may 'impression manage' (Goffman 1959) and position themselves in their "personal narrative performances" (Scheidt 2006) in relation to/in tension with fangirl

stereotypes. In the context of fans' 'goodbye narratives', I consider *iCarly*/fandom as a 'symbolic resource' (Zittoun 2006) that can be used generatively and therapeutically during youth development, arguing that the perfunctory dismissal of fangirls' investments problematically overlooks the important functions fandom can perform during this life stage.

Chapter One:
Locating the Fangirl in Fan Studies

An argument that underpins this thesis, and which comprises its main intervention, is that fan studies, thus far has marginalised the young female fan. While Henry Jenkins (2006e) claims that the internet has brought fans from the "margins of the media industry into the spotlight" (246), not all fans have escaped pathologisation or stereotyping, nor have they all had equal academic attention. While there are clear difficulties in studying fans that do not actively or visibly participate in fandom (Sandvoss 2005), with increased access to fandom via the internet and social media in particular, fan communities are attached to more and more diverse media objects, and populated by younger and younger fans. Yet, as this chapter argues, young fans, and girls in particular, have received only marginal scholarly attention. I contend it is crucial to begin exploring how young and new-to-fandom fans navigate and participate in fandom, how they negotiate (gendered/generational) fan stereotyping and pathologisation, and may "derive a distinct sense of self and social identity from their fan consumption" (ibid, 30) in the context of their lived experiences and youth development.

Several scholars, such as Cornel Sandvoss (2005) and Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998), have suggested that it is no longer necessary to contest problematic or pathologising stereotypes of fans since media fandom has been mainstreamed and fans are newly accepted. Conversely, Suzanne Scott (2011) and Matt Hills (2005a; 2012) argue that challenging fan stereotypes is not necessarily an outmoded approach since the "industrial normalization" of fandom does not mean that wider culture has similarly "embraced [all] fan identities as uncontroversial" (Hills 2012, 113). Indeed, divisions remain primarily along gender lines (Scott 2011) and, I would add, generational lines, with young female fans arguably carrying the greatest burden of negative fan stereotyping. After all, one of, if not the most, enduring stereotypes of the fan is that of a frighteningly obsessed, overly emotional, adolescent girl. Each facet of the stereotype, encapsulated in the discursive construction of the fangirl, are intertwined; there is a "cultural link between youth and emotional excess" (Stanfill 2013, 127), and emotionality and irrationality are "aligned with behaviour

that is gendered feminine" (ibid), which is then popularly reflected in the almost inevitable designation of the fangirl as 'hysterical'. Moreover, "comment[s] about 'crazy fangirls' … [show] the "links between gender and age as specific axes of distinction" (Williams 2013, 337) and point to the pathologisation of both.

Although the thesis is primarily located within fan studies and intends to intervene in debates within fan scholarship in the three case study chapters, I also draw on work from girls' studies in this chapter and throughout. Girls' scholarship has already begun the task of countering some of the assumptions and stereotypes of girls' media production and consumption practices that I argue have contributed to their marginalisation within fan studies, and thus girls' scholarship provides a useful counterpoint here. Specifically, I suggest that interrelated discourses regarding media effects, agency, and resistance, and assumptions about girls' consumption based on these discourses have contributed to their marginalisation. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this chapter seeks to forge a dialogue between girls' studies and fan studies in the context of girls' media culture. Harrington et al. (2011) have highlighted the need to bring fan studies 'into conversation' with other fields of study, while Jenkins (2007a) deems it necessary for the continuing viability of the field to expand the range of fan cultures that are studied. Not only do I contend that girls' studies and fan studies can learn much from each other about the status of being a fan and being a young woman in the current cultural context, but I also think that their 'meeting' is long overdue.

Girls' fandom has been documented back to (at least) the 1920s (Horwell 2014; Kearney 2006; Scheiner 2000), yet there is little acknowledgement of this history within fan studies itself beyond the acknowledgement that the figure of the fan was pathologised, feminised, and infantalised by mere association. In dismantling the fandom as pathology model, girl fans have been all but erased from fan studies history and, as I will argue, seemingly based on equally damaging, gendered, and age-based stereotypes and assumptions that demand challenging. Accordingly, I identify gaps in both fields of study and explore the crucial parallels and contradictions between them and their understanding of girls' engagement with popular culture. In doing so, I intend to highlight the importance of studying this gendered age group in the context of online fandom and expanding on the existing, albeit limited, literature that has

begun this task. Hills (2013) has stated that "scholarship still needs to reimagine fandom as a greater cultural collective" and that "taking fandom seriously should mean taking all fandoms seriously" (xii). Underlying this thesis is an impetus to analyse girls' fan culture from a much needed gender/age perspective, and to also highlight the very real need to take teenage fandom and fangirl identities and performances seriously. To begin it is important to first outline my use and definitions of key terms that are used throughout this thesis.

Defining 'Fan'

In popular usage, the word 'fan' "is slippery and expansive enough to include a broad range of different kinds of relationships to media, from the highly individualistic to the highly social" (Jenkins 1992, xiv). As Mark Duffett (2013) points out, scholars should understand that fandom "encompasses *both* individual engagement and social participation" (277, original emphasis). In fan studies, where the term has been subject to some debate, several scholars have attempted to distinguish between different kinds of fans and audiences, further reifying hierarchical structures based on productivity, community engagement, and intersections with identity. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) distinguished between fans and followers based on the extent to which one participates, and whether fandom informs, or is incorporated into, one's identity. In their work, fans were considered to be "active participants within fandom as a social, cultural and interpretive institution" (23) whilst followers, or regular audiences, were thought to not "claim [any] larger social identity on the basis of [their] consumption" (ibid).

In a similar vein, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) developed a taxonomy of audience engagements with popular culture, ranging from ordinary consumers to "petty producers" (141) with fans, cultists, and enthusiasts found along the middle of the continuum. Each of these categories are differently marked by their production and consumption practices; though each are involved in both, their participation differs in degree. In this conception, fans may be attached to particular stars or programmes, within the context of heavy media use, but they do not directly interact with other people who share the same attachments. On the other hand, cultists have explicit attachments to certain media texts and are closer to what scholarship usually

defines as a fan; a loosely organised group that circulate specialist materials within a fannish network. Sandvoss (2005) suggests that this continuum is beneficial to studying fandom across different genres, that by categorising fan groups in this way we can recognise "differences in productivity without resorting to problematic claims regarding the individual importance of fandom in creating a sense of self or identity, as Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) do" (31). That being said, adopting new terms and altering the definition of fan is unhelpful (Hills 2002) and "simply creates a misalignment between academic terms and popular usage" (Jenkins 2006f, n.p) as fans are more likely to refer to themselves as fans, rather than "cultists" (Sandvoss 2005). Thus, while fandom is "not a unified concept", and should, to some extent "be properly conceived as existing along a continuum (Harris 1998, 48), such a project is fraught with difficulty.

In its most simplistic form, a fan is simply "a self-identified enthusiast, devotee or follower of a particular media genre, text, person or activity" (Duffett 2013, 293). Many of the fans studied in this thesis claimed a fan identity in their discussions, and thus they fit this definition. While they did not all label themselves so specifically, it may be that participating in an online community is 'evidence' enough that they are fans. Indeed, as Karen Hellekson (2007) argues, "anybody who goes online… and engages in discussion with others about something is pretty much a fan" (n.p). Accordingly then, it seems appropriate to refer to all participants in each of the three spaces as 'fans' (combining both Duffett and Hellekson's definition of the term), since they are actively contributing to, and communicating in, an online community. In turn, such participation would seem to indicate a particular form of emotional investment or 'affect' (Grossberg 1992) that is associated with fandom, as well as imply "regular, repeated consumption" of a given text; two further characteristics that form a definition of 'fan' in Sandvoss' (2005, 7) conception. Having outlined my use of the term 'fan', I will now turn to a discussion of 'community'.

Defining 'Community'

Across various areas of academic study, 'community' is a much-debated term and open to a variety of interpretations (Baym 2010; Turkle 1997; Wellman and Gulia 1999). In fan studies, many discussions regarding community point to Benedict

Anderson's (1983) notion of the 'imagined community', which has been re-contextualised and applied to internet groups. Anderson's theory of community refers to a large formation, such as a nation, in which members may never meet or directly interact, but based on a shared set of identifications and the knowledge of shared activities, they hold a sense of connectedness and perceive themselves as part of a community. Rhiannon Bury (2005) has suggested that in the online context, a distinction between an 'imagined community' and an 'interactive community' is necessary; though both refer to a sense of belonging, the former indicates that interaction may not occur at all, while the latter is reliant on social interaction. Interactive communities in the online context are described as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public [and private] discussions long enough, with sufficient feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold 1993 cited in Bury 2005, 14). 'Interactive community' stands as a more complete conception given that, as well as accounting for interaction, it can also be understood to include notions of the imagined (this is not the case in the reverse, for the more limited conception of the 'imagined community' forecloses interaction). In an interactive community, fans often appear to situate themselves and their own interactions within a much broader (fandom) context, and may still "construct an imagined, implied community between themselves and… other imagined fans" (Sandvoss 2005, 57) where no other direct ties exist.

In this thesis, I primarily use the term community to refer to a 'sense of community' (Baym 2000; 2010) or "a sense of belonging together" (Cavicchi 1998, 161). As per Bury's definition of an interactive community, this sense may be fostered as a result of interacting in a group, taking part in discussions, and forming relationships with other members, as well as "through the experience of shared pleasure" (Geraghty 1991, 123) and "the *expectation* of shared experience" (Cavicchi 1998, 161, original emphasis). More specifically, Nancy Baym (2010) identifies five key qualities found in online groups and across multiple definitions of the term that can contribute to a 'sense of community'; a sense of shared space, shared identities, the exchange of resources and social support, the existence of interpersonal relationships, and rituals of shared practices. The 'sense of community' I refer to follows this composite definition, though acknowledging that not all these elements may be concurrently, consistently, or equally identifiable at any one time, or across the three online spaces I examine.

Baym (1998) proposes that "an online community can be categorised as such if the participants imagine themselves to be" (paraphrased in Phillips 2013, 13), and further that:

> one way in which to understand the imagination of community is through close examination of one of the most primal forces that ties people together—interpersonal interaction. It is in the details of their talk that people develop and maintain the rituals, traditions, norms, values, and senses of group and individual identity that allow them to consider themselves communities (Baym 2000, 218)

To varying extents, fans in each of the spaces considered here invoked notions of community in their comments, for instance referring to fandom as 'family'. Moreover, the nature of interactions between certain groups or pairings suggested that close relationships had been formed, that is, if they weren't explicitly stated. That being said, in Chapter Three, fans largely referred to spaces *outside* of Schneider's blog in terms akin to community and thus I avoid using the term to specifically refer to Blogspot; considering it more as a space which fans from many different corners of *iCarly* fandom visited to engage with the producer and the ancillary materials offered there.

Shared language can also cultivate a sense of belonging, forming a 'speech community' (Baym 1993), which I explore in Chapter Four in relation to 'fangirl speak' and the way in which such language functions to indicate emotional investment and a distinct fangirl performance or identity. Reflecting Baym's (2000) point above, Bury (2005) suggests that the repetition of acts by a majority of members, or 'communal practices', gives substance to the community. I use Bury's term in Chapter Two, as I suggest that performing in accordance with a community approved version of 'fangirlness' and other established 'communal practices' can be understood to signify belonging and function as a bid for fan(girl) symbolic capital (Hills 2002), as well as they were central to fans' pleasures and engagement in the community. I use the term 'community' most frequently in Chapter Two, though largely because LiveJournal (LJ) message boards are named as such by the platform, and not to suggest that the community there was cohesive or harmonious.

On the contrary, "communities are often marked by conflict and divisiveness" (Cherny 1999 cited in Chin 2010, 124) and while:

> interaction can provide a way of understanding how individuals imagine themselves as communities… [it] can also shed light on how communities fracture as boundaries are shaped and formed while members negotiate the values, rituals and norms of their community (Chin 2010, 124).

Accordingly, Bertha Chin (2010) suggests that the way in which 'community' and 'fandom' are often used interchangeably in fan studies and treated as 'one and the same' is inaccurate in painting a "picture of a homogenous fandom" (126). Indeed, both Chapter Two and Three serve to illustrate that fandom is far from unified or homogenous, and rather more "fragmented and fragmentary" (Busse and Hellekson 2006, 8), marked by hierarchical conflict and inter-/intra-fandom policing and distinctions. Fan communities that have formed out of conflict and exclusion can be theorised as 'micro-communities' (Chin 2010). In Chapter Two, within the context of hierarchical structures and distinctions, I discuss an example of such a micro-community, iWankarly, that was created by a group of Groovy Smoothie (GS) members as a result of conflicts within the GS community.

The idea of 'micro-communities' is used to refer not only to those that have broken away from another community, but also to acknowledge "the existence of multiple, niche communities that cater to very specific (if not very rigid) interpretations of the text" (Chin 2010, 7). In a sense, Tumblr can be seen as comprised of multiple, overlapping micro-communities as there is no one central meeting place, such as a message board, and thus the Tumblr tag group I focus on in Chapter Four may be best understood as a makeshift micro-community, insofar as it was comprised of a small group of fans that largely shared a specific (ship-related) interpretation of the text.

Thus, while Chin (2010) argues that in actuality fandom is comprised of various small-scale communities, this fragmentation may be even more pronounced in the age of social media as small-scale communities themselves are less concentrated in centralised spaces or platforms, such as LJ, and exist now across multiple platforms and even circulate within the same platform concurrently, as on Tumblr. I discuss this issue in more detail in the methodology section. For now, I wish to turn to a

discussion of the term 'fangirl', a figure for whom 'community' is considered to be particularly central to their mode of, and investment in, fandom.

Fangirls and Gendered Modes of Fandom

While fans have long been pathologised and feminised due to their close engagement with popular culture, fannish behaviour has not always been devalued and mocked along gendered lines. From the 1800s, the fans of popular performers were young men, both adolescent and pre-adolescent.[12] Although behaving with exuberant excess, young men's fandom was not a threat to masculine power, but a means of expressing it (female performers were available for "financially advantageous sexual liaisons") and thus they were not subject to the kinds of mocking young female fans are today (Horwell 2014, n.p). In the 1920s, when young women began earning a living and visiting the cinema, fans' passionate behaviour was redefined as contemptible. However, Veronica Horwell (2014) argues it was less that they were fans, but that they were young and female, and thus "risible in themselves" (n.p). Jenkins (1992) similarly notes a split in how male and female fans were perceived historically, with 'fan' used in a playful sense by sports writers, but in a pejorative sense in reference to 'matinee girls'. Arguably this gendered split remains, whereby it is more socially acceptable for males to be sports fans, for example, than it is for females to be fans of a musician. Moreover, though fanboys have not entirely escaped pathologisation, this has largely been based on perceived feminisation and thus male media fans are discriminated along gendered (female) lines also.

This gendered split, between playful and derogatory can be seen now reflected in the dual-definition of 'fangirl' as outlined in the Introduction. Although in both definitions the term is understood to primarily refer to female fans, it is the pejorative definition of the term that draws more distinctly on negative gender stereotypes and positions the 'feminine' as 'deviant'. I wish to expand on that here to consider in more depth the debates around the term 'fangirl' and how it has been used and understood in fan scholarship in order to specifically outline my own usage of the term.

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[12] According to Howell (2014) there are no records of female fans publicly adoring male actors pre-1920.

Fangirl is a slippery term, across and between academic and popular usage; for some scholars, it simply refers to a female fan (Bury 2005; Duffett 2013; Orman 2010; Scodari 2005), for others it refers to a mode of behaviour or a gendered performance, rather than being essentially tied to either sex or gender (Busse 2007a; Healey 2005; Levin Russo 2008; Scott 2011). Some fans use 'fangirl' to refer to themselves self-deprecatingly, others outright reject the term (Bury 2005), while others still, reclaim it in a positive feminist fashion (Healey 2009; Williams 2011a). Fangirls are marked by their "public enthusiasm" (Duffett 2013, 293) and while the term may be used affectionately to refer to enthusiastic displays of fandom, it may equally be used to mock fannish pleasures, including enthusiasm. 'Fangirl' raises issues of maturity and gender that can stereotype fans (Duffett 2013) and indeed, is often used as an insult by fans (adult, adolescent, male, female) themselves, as though there is nothing more insulting than being both young and female. Whilst the association of juvenile behaviour with fannish behaviour is concerning (one which affects fans of all ages and genders), and such a connection may be emphasised by 'fangirl' terminology, should the term be shunned altogether, or changed to 'fan woman' for instance, it would then only further 'Other' and marginalise young female fans; implying that distancing from this age/gender category is necessary, and thus seemingly reaffirming the term's use as an insult. I argue it is more productive to work towards challenging perceptions of young female fans and countering stereotypes, than it is to seek distance from this age/gender category, or simply to change the terminology.

Fangirls are often defined in relation to their sexual desires (Bury 2005; Healey 2009; Lackner et al. 2006; Zubernis and Larsen 2012) and thus the term is strongly tied to female sexual expression, or more specifically perceptions of unruly, deviant sexuality. Indeed, historically, it seems that the devaluation of fandom closely links to the policing of, and attempts to contain, female sexuality and emotionality. For Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012), criticism of female fan behaviour often brings into focus the cultural fear of female sexuality (see Chapter Two).[13] It was not always this way however, as Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) notes: "Though largely homosocial and often highly productive, girls' fan activities were made unthreatening to dominant society during the postwar era through the consistent framing of such fans

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[13] While girls are sexualised through language and dismissed as simply hormonal adolescents, women who partake in similar behaviour are derided for their immaturity and bad taste (Bode 2010; Cline 1992; Scodari 2014).

as young females pining for male celebrities" (48). In this way, girls' fannishness became reoriented within a heterocentric structure that continues to this day. Indeed, according to Bury (2005), "the fangirl quickly became a powerful heteronormative minus-male subject position offered to those of us with female bodies who express admiration for a male celebrity" (37). In Bury's work, fangirl is positioned as a pejorative term, "one which implies blurred boundaries and an excess of emotionality" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 38), a label from which the author, and a number of the fans studied, repeatedly set themselves apart.

Although fandom is compelling for female fans as a space inviting self- and sexual expression, and is an important part of fandom (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Meggers 2012; Zubernis and Larsen 2012), negative connotations of the 'fangirl', "whose desires control her and not vice versa" and "the discourse of desire as delusion" (Bury 2005, 38-39) contribute to the persistence of fangirl shame (Zubernis and Larsen 2012). Fangirl shame is explored specifically in Chapter Two (and more broadly throughout the thesis), and while it is loosely tied to sexual expression, for many of the self-confessed fangirls considered in this thesis, sexual desire does not overtly appear to structure their self-identifications with the term fangirl; their use of the term is only occasionally related to admiration for a male actor. In fact, it is used just as frequently in relation to a female actor and thus it is not used only in a heteronormative manner. Rather, 'fangirl' is primarily used to designate a performance of fannishness, investment, and affect, and therefore my use of the term in this context is not intended to invoke sexual connotations.

I consider it a feminist act to lay claim to a sexually desiring identity, disrupting the binary logic of the male gaze that would fail to construct the woman as "a desiring subject capable of objectification" (Bury 2005, 37). However, I also wish to move away from exclusively defining female fans, and by extension, fangirls, within these terms as it problematically reduces girls/women to only their sexuality (and the body) in ways no better than patriarchal society at large. Moreover, sexuality may only be a small part of fandom, with community and collectivity (Deller in Lynskey 2013), identification with female stars (Scheiner 2000), girl-girl friendships (Kearney 2006; Wald 2002), and aspirations to *be* the star (Allen 2011; Lumby 2007; Twersky (1995[1981]) also of great importance. By focusing heavily on sexuality, girls'

cultural production and other motivations and pleasures are overlooked and marginalised. Accordingly, in this thesis I explore how fans relate to *iCarly* in relation to their own gendered and generational subjectivities, how media/fandom may serve as a tool in navigating youth transitions (Chapter Four), and focus on the (other) pleasures of, and being in, fandom. I therefore use the term 'fangirl' to refer to a broader set of behaviours that have been linked with gender in a performative sense.

In emerging academic thought, the terms fangirl and fanboy can be seen to articulate different (gendered) modes of fandom across a range of fannish behaviours. Broadly speaking, fangirl modes are considered those to be based on fan productivity and community, opposed to fanboy modes based on institutions and economics (Brooker in Busse 2007a). Kristina Busse (2007a) argues that these differences may also be perceived differently in terms of gender:

> One (male?) version separates the serious, analytic, male engagement from the ludicrous, affective, female one. Another (female?) version narrows it down to: women create and men consume. Yet another distinction can be made between the female aggressively anti-commercial gift economy-based amateur art and the stepping stone, male version. (n.p).[14]

In this way, Busse draws attention to not only varying ways that differently gendered fans are perceived to behave, but also the attitudes that have come to be associated with these behaviours. The attitudes at work in these perceptions, drawing on binary distinctions of rational distance and 'serious' engagement, versus close emotional, 'ludicrous', and affective investment, are especially gendered. While binary distinctions traditionally associate women with consumption and men with production, these categories often shift uneasily in the context of fandom, yet they still remain in alignment with the pathologisation of fans based on gendered, if not precisely female, stereotypes.

Men positioned as consumers in this framework aligns with the ways in which they have been more closely associated with collecting and purchasing comic books, video games, attending conventions and such like (Pustz cited in Healey 2009; Scott 2011); engaging in profitable and officially sanctioned behaviours (Busse 2007a; Jenkins

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[14] While female fanfiction writers have been subject to, or at least fearful of, cease and desist orders, for some male fans producing fanwork, within corporate owned spaces rather than 'subcultural' spaces, has functioned as a stepping stone into a professional career (see: Brooker 2002; McKee 2004).

2006f). That women create rather than consume links with perceptions of emotional over-investment, i.e. that women are overly invested to the point that they are not satisfied by simply consuming the object of fandom, but rather they find ways to create more of what they love. Women tend also to engage in behaviours that are less accepted and accommodated by the industry; less content to "colour within the lines" set forth by popular culture created by men for men, women transform the text more significantly according to their own pleasures (Walker 2007, n.p), such as the production of slash fiction, which is less easily monetised. In this way, fangirls are considered unpredictable and are a more likely target of industrial attempts to control, mute, or quell fandom (ibid). Fangirl practices, deemed "illegitimate, less commercial [and] more problematic" (Busse in Jenkins 2006f, n.p) are feared under threat in "the celebration of male convergence" (ibid), and fangirls, as they attempt to "obscure their practices from the industry's view" (Scott 2011, 19-20) are feared increasingly "invisible (or worse, actively excluded)" (ibid, 4) in convergence culture. Whilst I am not focusing in this thesis on fan's cultural production *per se*, this same devaluing can be seen reflected in the producer's attempt to control fans' shipping practices discussed in Chapter Three. Moreover, the (potential) invisibility of fangirls is reflected in Chapter Two with Groovy Smoothie (GS) fans' desire to hide upon Schneider's arrival in the community, and the threat to fangirl modes in the suppression of fannish activities after his arrival.

Highlighting "the need to model fandom in terms of multiple axes of engagement rather than a singular binary", for Julie Levin Russo (2008), "the labels [fangirl and fanboy] function as an inconsistent and overdetermined shorthand for an array of continuums that diagnose variations in fan participation" (n.p). Levin Russo (2008) presents these multiple dimensions as follows:

      corporate economy <---> gift economy
      consuming <---> producing
      derivative <---> transformative
      "as is" <---> "creative" (Anne Kustritz)
      closure <---> openness
      knowledge <---> relationships
      heteronormative <---> queer
      mainstream <---> subcultural
      semi-public <---> semi-private
      individual <---> community
      casual/watercooler <---> fanatical

The terms fangirl and fanboy are often considered problematic for the connotation of being tied to biological sex or gender.[15] Although fangirl and fanboy modes often do align with women and men (anecdotally and empirically), these "gendered fannish orientations" should not be collapsed into female and male, but kept strictly apart (Levin Russo in Busse 2007a). Moreover, the terms are not mutually exclusive forms of fannish behaviour or engagement; a fan may very well behave in various ways within the same, and across different fandoms, depending on individual investments (Scott 2007a).

While acknowledging that gendering fandom is especially problematic, Busse (2007a) argues that practices/devaluing often is "gender related, and to use gendered terms draws attention to that fact" (n.p). As "shorthands for approaches" fangirl and fanboy could be replaced with "collective and individual" or "creators and collectors" (ibid), but adopting alternative terms is problematic in erasing gender entirely when it is implicated on so many levels. The concepts of 'affirmational' and 'transformational' modes (obsession_inc 2009) which loosely map on to gender, may provide a useful distinction between different modes of engaging in fandom and with TPTB, with the former usually taking place on official sites, and the latter in fannish spaces such as LJ. Indeed, I use these terms in Chapter Two in order to make sense of conflicts between fans and in the fan/producer relationship. However, these terms are restricted in that they do not account for, or at least make less explicit, the multiple dimensions/continuums described above. Thus, while the fangirl/fanboy taxonomy risks "imprecision and oversimplification" (Levin Russo 2008, n.p), it remains useful in recognising a gendered hierarchy in which certain practices are valued over others, and "as an abbreviation for disparities that we have collectively come to recognize as infused with gendered inequality" (ibid).

Accordingly, my use of the term 'fangirl' refers to a set of fan behaviours or modes of fannishness that are neither essentially nor inherently gendered, but which are often devalued on the basis of (presumed) gender. More specifically, I use it to refer to a form of gender performativity. Building on Judith Butler's (1990) performative

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[15] Debates of this nature ran throughout the Gender and Fan Culture series hosted on Jenkins' blog in 2007 which are mirrored and compiled on LiveJournal at http://fandebate.livejournal.com/.

definition of gender, Bob Rehak (2007) argues that fangirl/fanboy offers a way to discuss:

> fannish affiliations as themselves a kind of performance and identity play: my choice of text enables me to (temporarily) play at being a different kind of fan/boy/girl, as does the way I read the text and the relationships I form around that practice of reading. It's fandom as a kind of masquerade (n.p).

Similarly, and following Karen Healey (2009), I define 'fangirl' as a performative identity, a "performative gender specific to fannishness…dependent on behaviours and traits performed rather than any essential nature of the person so defined or self-defined" (154).

Having now outlined my use of key terms used in this thesis I will now consider the history of fangirls' dismissal and how the negative discourses regarding female fans translated into a broader pathologisation of the figure of the fan that informed much of early fan scholarship. This discussion will further elucidate my argument as to why I contend young female fans have been marginalised in academic studies of fandom and underline the necessity for their inclusion in the field.

Devaluing of the Feminine and Girls' Culture

The dismissal or neglect of texts favoured by women and the marginalisation of girls and girls' culture is shaped by a long history whereby mass culture is feminised and the masses are gendered feminine, and thus devalued (Huyssen 1989). Mass culture came to be associated with women during the nineteenth century, in part due to the fear and feminisation of emotion and consumption that stood in direct opposition to the masculinised values of rationalism and production. The passive mass audience was considered unable to create 'authentic' meaning from the 'trivial' content of the mass culture industry, as the texts themselves were considered devoid of 'authentic' meanings.[16] Accordingly, feelings inspired by a mass culture object were considered false, shallow, or homogeneous, and thus emotion was (even more) a dangerous pleasure. This discrediting of the popular and feminised culture within the modernist perspective largely rested on a set of binary oppositions that I have already touched on: active/passive, authentic/inauthentic, production/consumption, rational distance

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[16] See: Adorno (1990[1941]); (1991).

and detachment/emotional investment and closeness, and high culture/mass culture. This deeply rooted dichotomy of reason versus emotion, or the "reason/passion binary" (Burr 2005, 380-81), is closely linked with class and economic capital (in Bourdieu's [1984] theorisation), and as a further opposition, gender can be mapped on to, and seen to traverse, this set of binaries (Hermes 2005; Thornton 1995).

It is my contention that these gendered binary structures have not been entirely eroded since they continue to be invoked within contemporary fan scholarship, at least insofar as they can be understood to have contributed to the marginalisation of the young female fan (and their fannish objects) who is culturally constructed almost exclusively within these divisions, and hence devalued as passive, excessively emotional, consumers of 'inauthentic' mass culture. Moreover, although I will discuss this point in more detail later in the chapter, there appears to remain a distinction at play between subculture and mass culture in fan studies which implicates age and gender, and thus to some extent marginalises girl fans. This can be seen reflected in the kinds of fan texts that are selected for analysis and have come to dominate fan studies. For now, I continue to explore the historical underpinnings of the field.

Prior to the emergence of fan studies as a distinct field, feminist audience studies first sought to challenge the associations and discourses which position the feminine with passivity, consumption, and emotional excess. This area of research, to which I now turn, also made "previously 'illegitimate', and thus marginal cultural forms [predominantly 'feminised' texts]… 'legitimate', and thus 'mainstream objects of analysis'" (Read 2003, 61).

Feminist Audience Studies

Reflecting the 'effects model' of early audience research, feminist criticism had focused on analysing "dangerous depictions of women" (Hermes 2005, 144) in the media, with its messages thought to be passively absorbed by women. Prompted by the possibilities that emerged following Stuart Hall's ([1973]1980) theory of encoding/decoding and David Morley's (1980) application of this model, audiences

were beginning to be theorised as active (Fiske 1987),[17] and feminist scholars began to take great interest in how women "actively and creatively make their own meanings and create their own culture" (Ang 1990, 242). Coinciding with a 'populist turn'[18] in British cultural studies, in which popular culture was repositioned as meaningful, and the text and its audience considered worthy of study, feminist audience studies sought to re-evaluate and interrogate the serious uses of devalued texts favoured by women. Pleasure had long been an area of contestation in feminist cultural politics (Ang 1985), and part of the shift in scholarship included reassessing the pleasures and political possibilities of feminine culture and consumption.

Although the focus of empirical studies was less on what was being read, and more concerned with how and why the audience read a given text (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003), feminist intent was located in the very selection of texts that were studied, i.e. popular forms that were attributed very little critical worth based on their feminisation such as soap opera[19] (Ang 1985; Brunsdon 1997; Geraghty 1991; Hobson 1982; Thomas 2002), romance novels (Radway 1984), and magazines (McRobbie 1977). While girls' texts were subject to some academic inquiry, such as Angela McRobbie's studies of girls' magazines, empirical studies were focused on understanding adult women, rather than girls (and girls' culture) as a unique social formation, with little attention paid to the relationship of gender to age and generation. As such, girls' voices were marginalised in this context. While I will return to the important work of McRobbie later in the chapter, it is worth noting here a critique of the 1977 study of teen magazine, *Jackie*, since it illustrates some of the (continuing) assumptions made in regards to girls' consumption and their resistant potential.[20]

McRobbie (2000[1977]) suggested that the concept of reappropriation was of limited usefulness to girls since they play little, if any, role in shaping their own popular culture, thus positioning girls as powerless and malleable. Since *Jackie* did not invite girls to actively participate, McRobbie considered reappropriation to be difficult,

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[17] Brunsdon (n.d) argues that Fiske's *Television Culture* (1987) was one of the first books that took seriously the feminist agenda that continues to shape television studies.
[18] See: Kellner (1997); Morris (1988); Turner (2005).
[19] Television itself was also ascribed feminine characteristics by virtue of its location in the domestic sphere and as a popularised cultural form (see: Petro 1986).
[20] See also: Currie (1999) later examined girls' magazines as 'social texts', with the reader at the centre of the study, moving "beyond the text itself to its reading" (118), and critiqued McRobbie's failure to shed much light on girls' 'everyday readings' by prioritising scholarly readings of teenage magazines.

which in turn left little space to use the text in subversive ways. Conversely, just because participation is not explicitly invited should not be considered *a priori* or necessary restraint on girls' potential reappropriation or subversion of the text. To assume this without studying girls' use of the text, girls are doubly denied any agency. McRobbie (2000[1977]) claimed the magazine had a "powerful ideological presence as a form" (72) and thus it demanded analysis apart from its 'readings' and 'uses'. Yet, by neglecting to incorporate girls' responses or exploring to what extent they follow the "prescriptive engagement" (Brooker and Jermyn 2003, 215) laid out for them, it can only be assumed that all girls read and used the text in the same designated way, and were all essentially imprisoned by the supposedly powerful ideologies embedded in the text. Thus girls, as a homogenous mass, were positioned as devoid of any resistant potential; a characterisation which I argue fan studies has inherited from cultural studies, and which has thus contributed to their absence in fan scholarship since, and as I will go on to illustrate, resistance comprises a dominant discourse in fan studies. First, I briefly turn to the links and discrepancies between fan studies and feminist work discussed above.

Aca-Fandom, Feminism, and 'Feminised' Texts

Arising in part out of the feminist audience studies tradition, the so-called 'first wave' of fan studies (Gray et al. 2007) began with the concurrent 1992 publications of Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers*, Constance Penley's "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture", Camille Bacon Smith's *Enterprising Women,* and Lisa Lewis's edited collection *The Adoring Audience*. In Jonathan Gray et al.'s conception, the first wave fought against the 'Othering' and pathologisation of fans and championed their cultural tastes. Much early scholarship offered fans the opportunity to speak for themselves and was conducted by academics who were part of fan cultures themselves. Accounting for the close relationship between feminism and fan studies, Jenkins (2013, x) notes that the 'autobiographical turn' in feminist cultural studies, marked as it was by a confession, "I am a feminist, but I also happen to love reading… romances…or watching soap opera" (Hermes 2005, 145), gave rise to 'aca-fandom'. Coined later by Hills (2002), aca-fandom is considered a "fundamentally feminist" project since it is an "integration of personal and professional" (Stein 2011a, n.p). That being said, fan studies did not similarly embrace 'feminised' texts (and

arguably still hasn't entirely), and as Scott suggests in conversation with Jenkins (2013), the "devaluation of feminized mass culture has not changed since *Textual Poachers"* (x). Indeed, the "horror of the feminine has heavily influenced the (current) representation of popular culture" (Hermes 2005, 135), and it is in this way that gendered perceptions of mass culture can be seen to persist today, both within culture more broadly (as evidenced by the persistent derision of [young] female fans and their fan object[s]), and within fan scholarship (as evidenced by the scarcity of work on more commercial or feminised texts, and hence the marginalisation of teen fandom and girl fans).

In fan studies I suggest that there has been a distancing from feminised mass culture through its heavy focus on 'cult' TV texts, which by common definition, are seen as alternative or opposed to the mainstream (Jancovich & Hunt 2004; Hills 2007) and thus coded as masculine (Read 2003; Hollows 2003).[21] Acknowledging the limited range of texts and audiences that have been studied in depth in media/cultural studies as a whole, Hills (2007) refers to this as the 'canon problem'. Hills argues that, given scholar fans are already subject to their own version of pathologisation, amongst questions regarding legitimacy and whether the media fan represents a 'scandalous figure', "texts aimed at upscale audiences…or enacting a 'cult' anticommercial and antimainstream ideology are… more likely to meet with academic fervor and canonization" (40). In turn, the likelihood of scholars aligning themselves with 'lower' (and hence feminised or youth) cultural forms would seem to further decrease.[22] For Jason Mittell (2010), the prevalence of scholarship dedicated to 'quality television' suggests that taste is more frequently a motivating factor than many would admit and thus he calls for more transparency on scholars' fannish tendencies.[23] Indeed, while it is understandable that scholars may wish to write about what they love (in the aca-fandom tradition), I also struggle to believe the lack of other (devalued, commercial, feminised) taste cultures is a result of a scarcity of scholars with these tastes. Rather, the overrepresentation of specific taste cultures (Hills 2007) is likely equally, if not more, to do with the willingness to align oneself with certain tastes. 'Cult' forms or

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[21] Of course, the gendered coding of the 'mainstream' and 'cult' is somewhat problematic, insofar as it may "[roll] outward to a perception of the fan community… hid[ing] a variety of fans of both genders" (Duffett 2013, 194).
[22] Jenkins (2011) acknowledges that such a focus is in stark contrast to John Fiske's work that often revealed a bias to the middle-brow, thus contradicting expectations or perceptions regarding what intellectuals enjoy watching.
[23] See: Bogost (2010) who takes this one step further in reply to Mittell (2010) by suggesting that media scholars should resist aca-fandom and question more the quality of what we study.

those that "skew male" (Busse 2010, n.p) would seem a more 'legitimate' taste with which to align oneself, and as Jacinda Read (2003) suggests, subcultural writing may "militate against the feminizing effects of fandom" (58). In this conception then, a link appears to be made between distancing from 'feminisation' and discourses of resistance and with that in mind, I now want to pick up on the theme of resistance, first in fan studies and then in girls' studies, to consider how fans and girls have been discussed within this framework, and marginalised *because* of its dominance in the field(s).

Cultural Power and Resistance in Fan Studies

In early work on fans, scholars such as Fiske and Jenkins were inspired by the work of Michel de Certeau (1989) and distinctions between "the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the disempowered" (Gray et al. 2007, 2). Consumption of popular mass media was seen as a site of power struggle, with fandom a tactic of the disempowered. For Fiske (1992), fandom was typically associated with cultural forms that are denigrated by the dominant value system and thus "fans are associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (30). Although Fiske was careful to state that fandom is not confined to the socially or culturally deprived, he argued that fandom can offer a way to make up for cultural lack as it provides the social prestige and self-esteem usually associated with cultural capital.[24] Fandom may also act as a vehicle for marginalised groups "to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations" (Duffett 2013, 40) that may not be otherwise reflected in media narratives. Considering these observations one would expect teenage/girl fandoms to have had a particularly significant place in fan studies, however they have not.

As the 'powerless elite' (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995), fans' only form of power was seen located in their ability to transform the text through textual poaching and subvert the meanings 'imposed' on them via resistant reading. Notions of resistance became central to early fan studies in which there was a focus on highlighting that fans were

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[24] For instance, Fiske (1992) referred to his previous work (1989) in which he illustrated how teenage girl fans of Madonna drew on the self-empowerment of fandom to take control of their own sexuality. Although teen girl fandom was mentioned, the combined axes of gender/age were not fully explored.

not merely fans of something, but a community engaging in semiotic resistance of dominant ideologies set forth by the producers of the text in question. Through the creation of fan texts, fans were seen as challenging the idea of the ownership of the text and were characterised by their grassroots cultural production.[25] 'Resistant poaching' thus "provided the key metaphor" for the fan/producer distinction (Duffett 2013, 73) and was seen to blur the line between producer and consumer. Yet, much of the early work (Fiske 1992; Jenkins 1992; Penley 1992; Tulloch and Jenkins 1995), intended to defend fans and move beyond binary structures in which the fan was 'Othered', instead only re-orientated the fan's place within these structures (Gray et al. 2007; Jancovich and Hunt 2004; McKee 2004), problematically reiterating distinctions between powerful producers and disempowered consumers.

In more recent years, notions of 'textual poaching' have been re-examined in light of technological developments, social media, and fans' shifting relations with text and industry in participatory culture (Bennett 2014; Chin 2010; McCulloch et al. 2013). Chin (2010) argues that fans may not identify themselves as poachers, but rather 'textual gifters', and "Continuing to define fans as textual poachers acknowledges the notion that fans are operating from a socially subordinate space, and that fandom can only be understood as a form of resistance to commercial culture" (21). Rather, Chin proposes, "fans collaborate with the commercial culture they allegedly poach from as much as they resist commercial culture's attempts at controlling them" (2). While the producer may continue to hold the ultimate power over the text (Hills 2010), fans are increasingly courted by producers online and may begin to feel empowered, or that they exert some influence over its development (Costello and Moore 2007; Felschow 2010; Hills 2002; Williams 2010). While fans' cultural power remains very limited, Hills (2002) is careful to acknowledge that "cultural power cannot be located in any one group" (44). Indeed, McCulloch et al. (2013) in a debate regarding the extent to which fandom can be understood as a negotiated form of brand ownership, conclude that brand strategists "are no longer the ones in control; rather, they are participants in a 'conversation'" (325). Cultural power relations between fans and producers are thus

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[25] With a focus on fans' textual output, certain fan practices were excluded and the exclusion of non-text producing fans thus further rendered the fan as 'Other' in contrast to the majority of the audience. Harrington and Bielby's (1995) work on soap opera fans sought to redress this balance, examining who fans are, rather than focusing only on what they do, while the growing body of research on anti-fans continues to broaden the concept of fan engagement.

increasingly complex in the digital age, as well as they are also more visible (see Chapter Two and Three). In turn, conflicts are more visible, and fans potentially more vulnerable to pathologised representations within the fantexts, which may strongly indicate how a producer of a program views their fans (Felschow 2010, 4.7).

Accordingly, in an examination of the cultural construction of the fangirl, in Chapter Three I analyse the representation of *iCarly* fans in an episode of the sitcom and fans' responses. While there have been analyses of fan representations (Hills 2012; Jenkins 1992; Johnson 2007a; Scott 2011), very few have combined an analysis with fan responses.[26] Thus far, work in this area has not included an analysis of the producer's (defence) strategies in response to fan criticism, nor the implications the representation and fan/producer interactions within this context may have for fan-fan relations. Considering that emerging work on intra-fandom (Stanfill 2013) and inter-fandom (Busse 2013; Hills 2012; Williams 2013) suggests that fans may validate negative stereotypes of fans, but distance themselves from them by instead pathologising others, it would seem crucial to attend to a negative portrayal of already devalued fans (i.e., the fangirl) and explore how they negotiate negative representations, what distinctions and hierarchies may arise as a result, and how the producer's disciplinary and defence strategies may be received and seen as a catalyst in intra-fandom policing.

As I have outlined, concepts of resistance have long circulated within fan studies. Although resistance has been subject to critique in this context, its gender/age connotations have not been particularly acknowledged. As I now turn my attention to girls' studies, I will illustrate the ways in which discourses of resistance historically worked to exclude the girl, and how more recent work has begun to challenge the conformist/resistant binary and reorient it in studies of girls' media culture.

Girls and Resistance

While female fans in particular were presented as 'resistant' in early fan studies, seen to be challenging "the patriarchal and heteronormative values of mass media texts" (Scott 2011, 21), intersections of age and gender were left unconsidered, and thus girls'

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[26] Exceptions include: Felschow (2010); Schmidt (2010).

(rather than adult women) appear excluded from these studies. The central concern with grassroots creativity and resistance, criticised as leading to "an almost uncritical celebration of fans as 'resisters'" (Barker 1993, 180),[27] was inspired by the work of scholars at the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Jenkins 2014). These origins are notable in this context, since the CCCS and their research on youth subcultures was particularly focused on theories of resistance and transgression (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979), and criticised by McRobbie, then a Birmingham School scholar, for its gender blindness.

In 'Girls and Subcultures', McRobbie and Garber (2000[1976]) criticised the absence of girls in subcultural ethnographic studies and the implication that girls are uncritical consumers, suggesting that the very concept of subculture had acquired 'masculine overtones' (14). McRobbie and Garber identified that girls had a different way of "organising their cultural life" and "form a distinctive culture of their own" (22) within the space of the bedroom and around 'teenybopper' culture. In contrast to the CCCS, resistance was not a central issue for McRobbie and Garber; in 1976, although they suggested that girls' culture offered them "different possibilities for 'resistance'" (24), they questioned whether 'resistance' was the right term to use, and later, McRobbie (1993) called for a recognition of girls as more than merely consumers and rather "active negotiators and producers of culture" (423). While Jenkins (2014) credits McRobbie (1992[1980]) with helping "to re-centre ideas about resistance and appropriation onto the study of fandom", he also acknowledges that work on girls' 'teenybopper' cultures were a distinctly "different kind of fan culture than would dominate subsequent discussions" (91). Rather, alongside the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982; Brown and Gilligan 1992), McRobbie (2000[1980]; 1982; 2000[1991]) helped lay the groundwork for future work that would address the imbalance of power evident in youth-orientated research by prioritising girls' voices and perspectives.[28]

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[27] Critics have argued that fan resistance has been overstated, insofar as the ('cult') text itself invites imaginative audience engagement and thus fans are responding to the text in ways structured in to the narrative (McKee 2004). Moreover, audiences producing their own meanings should not automatically imply that the preferred or dominant reading is subverted. Resistance and oppositional readings also need careful contextualisation, particularly in relation to cultural groups that are characterised by 'rebelliousness' such as adolescents (see: Evans 1990, 161).

[28] See: Duits and Van Zoonen (2009); Kearney (2009; 2011); Mazzarella and Pecora (2007).

In what Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Pecora (2007) refer to as the first wave of girls' studies, scholarship focused mainly on media representations of girlhood, particularly on texts that privileged girl protagonists, and the 'messages sent' to girls by the cultural industry. These were often linked to the supposed negative effects of the media on young girls, reiterating the notion of girls as passive consumers, vulnerable, and in need of protection.[29] As girls became more visible in popular culture, concern for girls peaked exponentially (Harris 2004a; 2004b; Mazzarella and Pecora 2007; Mazzarella 2005a; Projansky 2014). In this context, two dominant, competing definitions of girlhood formed on the basis of discourses on 'girl power' and 'Reviving Ophelia' (Pipher 1994), or what Anita Harris (2004b) refers to as "the 'can-do' girl versus the 'at-risk' girl" (13-36) paradigm.[30] Mazzarella (2008) links the passive victim narrative of the 'at-risk' girl to the lack of (initial) acknowledgement that girls could be resistant to the cultural messages of the media, or active producers of their own media culture. Moreover, in being overly careful not to celebrate girls' media culture, particularly that which co-opted feminist rhetoric in its commodification of 'girl power' (Greer 1999; Hopkins 2002; Lemish 1998; 2003; McRobbie 2009; Riordan 2001), explorations of girls' negotiations of popular culture were largely excluded, and thus ideologies associated with the media effects model remained mostly unchallenged. Although girls studies has since moved beyond the effects model, and has increasingly incorporated girls' voices into academic research, notions of the media's effect on children, and girls in particular, remains influential in public debate.[31]

Negotiation and Distinction

Girls' studies scholars since the second wave have focused more on girls' reception[32] and negotiations of culture and media 'messages' (Duits and Romondt Vis. 2009; Durham 1999a; 1999b; Duvall 2010; Jackson and Vares 2011; Reznik and Lemish 2011; Vares et al. 2011), with some work illustrating that girls' negotiative, even resistant practices need not necessarily foreclose their ability to simultaneously find

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[29] This has since been modified significantly whereby the power of the media is seen as "work[ing] in and through subjects, not in terms of crude manipulation, but by structuring our sense of self, by constructing particular kinds of subjectivity" (Gill 2007, 276).

[30] See: Aapola et al. (2005); Bottrell (2008); Gonick (2006); McRobbie (2009).

[31] In recent years for example, girls' increasing use of the internet and the potential dangers that may confront them has been a major source of concern (Edwards 2005).

[32] Nevertheless, attention to girls' personal accounts of their experiences with media remains relatively minimal (Duvall 2010).

pleasure in the media object (Lowe 2003; 2004; Rakow and Rakow 1999; Valdivia and Bettivia 1999). Indeed, Melanie Lowe (2004) suggests that resisting patriarchal content may even be a pleasure of participating in 'teen-pop' culture itself (94). There have also been important steps towards considering girls' resistance in a more negotiated way in order to recognise it on its own terms. This is critical to note here due to the parallels and discrepancies that can be seen between how girls and women have been studied in girls' studies and fan studies respectively, and in regards to differing gendered connotations of resistance in the two fields.

Meenakshi Gigi Durham (1999a) argues that it is unrealistic to expect girls to individually resist mediated messages of normative femininity, since girl culture is inherently communitarian. Durham states that: "the widely accepted construction of autonomous and individual 'resistant reading' neglects important aspects of girls' lives" (210). Rather, the question of girls' resistance "must be approached, instead, in terms of communities and collectivities that form a central part of girls' culture" (ibid). Reframing a theory of resistance in terms of collective feminist activism within girls' culture, Durham concludes that as scholars, we must:

> move away from the male-centered constructions of autonomous and individual "resistant reading" and then find ways to think in terms of communities and collectivities, to strengthen the bonds from woman to woman—that is, from girl to girl—and thus transform "resistant reading" into an act of affirmation and inclusion rather than isolation (226).

In essence then, what Durham implies, is that girls' scholars expected/hoped girls would engage in resistant reading practices and then found them to be lacking when attempting to squeeze them into an already existing, ill-fitting framework. Not only had the construction of resistance acquired 'masculine overtones' (akin to subculture studies), but studies had considered girls on an individual basis when this was not reflective of their culture or media consumption practices. With such an approach, girls' resistance was either obscured from view (located outside the resistance framework) or hindered by isolating girls from their peers. Durham argues that viewing media in groups of female friends, and discussing media culture with other girls, helps to balance negative media messages because young viewers have a more difficult time resisting negative gender representations in isolation. In light of this, it is therefore more productive to study girls' media reception as part of a group,

particularly if concerned with exploring girls' resistant/negotiative capacities. Arguably, a fan community would be one critical and contemporary example that could go some way in exploring how girls may negotiate or resist collectively.

In fan studies, as I have illustrated, adult female fans have been positioned as particularly resistant, yet often within the context of a wider community; exactly as Durham advocates is necessary for studies of girls. Resistance in the context of fan studies does not then appear to have acquired the same gendered or individualist connotations as that which Durham critiqued in relation to girls. Although this may be a difference between academic fields, it also goes some way in suggesting that the intersections of age/gender are especially critical to attend to, rather than focusing on gender alone, insofar as adult female fans have been theorised as resistant but girl fans have not. In the cultural construction of young female fans, they are predominantly presented as a homogeneous mass, all blindly following the crowd in a conformist manner. Yet, in terms of Durham's argument here, and in light of fan studies' focus on communities of (adult) female fans resisting, it seems girls' resistance has been potentially underestimated.[33] Girls may be (more) resistant as part of a group, but, academic explorations of this have been hindered; in girls' studies, by isolating girls from each other, and in fan studies, by excluding them and potentially buying into assumptions of girls as susceptible to media 'messages' or "hegemonic tendencies" (Driscoll 2002, 11). Conversely, if girl fans can be considered in the same terms as adult fans have been, that is, in a community setting, thus satisfying Durham's (1999a) demand that "any theory of girls' resistance…must acknowledge the centrality of relationship and connection in girls' culture" (222), then stereotypes of girl fans may be effectively challenged. The history of assumptions of girls as passive, susceptible, and conformist would further reinforce the importance of a study of girls' fan cultures.

Before moving on, I do want to draw attention to an important point with regards to girls' resistance in the context of this thesis. Catherine Driscoll (2002) suggests that feminist cultural studies has inherited from the CCCS a "tendency to represent and discuss girls as conformist rather than resistant or at least to study them almost

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[33] Exceptions include Ehrenreich et al.'s (1992) analysis of girls and Beatlemania, which in contrast to their media representation, was argued to reflect mass rebellion rather than mass conformity.

exclusively with reference to that division" (11), and such a tendency demands addressing. While I agree that it may be reductive to consider girls primarily in reference to this division, I do believe that resistance is an important consideration in terms of girl fans, given their cultural construction and history in, or more precisely outside, fan studies. Having said that, I do not situate girl fans exclusively within this division, but instead throughout this thesis consider them as active negotiators (McRobbie 1993), attending in particular to the ways in which *iCarly* fans negotiate (affirm, challenge, reclaim) fangirl stereotypes, identities, and performances in the context of their stigmatisation, and locating these practices within a broader context of age/gender inequalities. Driscoll (2008a) argues that 'girl cultural capital' is neither "'conformist' nor 'resistant', but exceeds and questions those oppositions by encompassing multiple variations on them" (78). Likewise, this thesis illustrates that fangirl performances (labelled inconsistently) and 'fangirl' capital fluctuate in different contexts, for different purposes, in alignment with disparate definitions/perceptions/aspects of 'fangirl', and become differently valued within inter- and intra-fandom fan(girl) hierarchies.

Remaining focused on the hierarchical nature of fandom and notions of fan capital, it is important to note here the influential nature of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work on cultural distinction within fan studies. Building on Bourdieu's metaphor of culture as an economy in which one invests and accumulates capital (Fiske 1992), scholarship in the second wave of fan studies (as defined by Gray et al. 2007) (and beyond) highlighted the ways in which social and cultural hierarchies were reproduced within fan cultures (Chin 2010; Dell 1998; Fiske 1992; Harris 1998; Hills 2002; MacDonald 1998; Thornton 1995). More specifically, Bourdieu's work enabled fan scholars to (re-)consider fan culture as a social hierarchy, rather than 'simply' a community (Hills 2002), in which different types of capital (namely cultural capital, to a lesser extent social capital, but also extended to symbolic capital and *fan* symbolic capital [Hills 2002]) are both unequally distributed and work to produce social privilege (Fiske 1992), 'status' (Hills 2002), or 'distinction'. Given my concern with strategies of defence and legitimisation within the context of hierarchical distinctions, Bourdieu's theories are potentially useful here. However, I have drawn on other bodies of literature and theory and for three primary reasons which have been discussed in

previous critiques of Bourdieu's theory, and which have particular ramifications in the context of this thesis specifically.

Firstly, as Fiske (1992) describes, economics and class are highlighted as the main "(if not the only) dimension of social discrimination" (32) in Bourdieu's model, and thus the axes of gender, age, and race are left unaccounted for. Although Hills (2002) disputes the assertion that age is neglected, given Bourdieu's concern with "'intergenerational' differences and struggles" (51), one of the main intentions of this thesis is to consider age and gender as *intersecting* identity markers that in combination (as young and female) contribute to social (and fan) discrimination; an intention that Bourdieu's work does not easily support. Secondly, in reference to Jenkins (1992), Hills (2002) notes that adopting Bourdieu's model involves "treating popular culture and media fandom as a 'scandalous category'" (49) since both are considered examples of improper, unsophisticated or 'bad' taste (as it is so conceptualised) in opposition to high class, bourgeois, or 'good' taste. Given that *iCarly* fans may already, in some perceptions, comprise a 'scandalous category' of their own, and are already a stigmatised demographic (girls and young women) then further delegitimised for their interest in a culturally devalued object/genre (a tween show), applying this model would seem to contribute further to their devaluation and the devaluing of their tastes. Moreover, it would also work to undermine, if not counter, my intention to take these fans, their fan text, and the ways in which they relate to, engage with, and interpret their fan text seriously.[34]

Thirdly, Bourdieu's model does not offer the possibility that struggles over cultural capital can occur *within* a particular community or subculture (or that "subspecies of capital" may operate within these domains [Thornton 1995, 11] such as 'fangirl capital' [see Chapter Two]) and thus do not always directly correspond with class distinctions (Hills 2002; Thornton 1995). Similarly, it also neglects to account for the ways in which these struggles for status (and what forms of capital one needs to possess) may shift subtly across similar communities or subcommunities and the multiple dimensions along which hierarchies are constructed within and between

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[34] Since, as Jenkins (1992) notes, "Taste distinctions determine not only desirable and undesirable forms of culture but also desirable and undesirable ways of relating to cultural objects… strategies of interpretation and styles of consumption" (15).

different spaces. Finally, it does not account for imagined subjectivities or imagined Others that may or may not necessarily exist, but which one fan/group may seek to distinguish themselves from, or position themselves above, such as the figure of the fangirl in their most negatively stereotyped form (see Chapter Two). Work on inter-/intra-fandom (Busse 2013; Hills 2012; Stanfill 2013; which I combine with the concept of Heimat [Sandvoss 2005] and sociological theory on stigma [Goffman 1963]) however, allows for these possibilities (whether directly or indirectly) and the subtle and finely-grained distinctions that fans may draw up between themselves and others that are, at least in terms of gender, generation, and (fan)culture, not vastly or objectively different. Although there is work on inter-fandom that draws explicitly on Bourdieu's theories of distinction and capital (Williams 2013), much of it may be better understood as implicitly inspired by, and borrowing the language of, distinction but building on Bourdieu's work by filling in the gaps that his model did not account for.

Having outlined the ways in which fans and fandom have been conceptualised within fan studies, and the ways in which the dominant framework of resistance can be understood to have contributed to girls' marginalisation in the field, I now turn to an examination of how girls' fan objects are (de)valued and teen TV has been studied academically. Nash and Lahti (1999) argue that fangirls are fully "aware of the stamp of devaluation their fandom carries in society" (83) and employ a range of rhetorical strategies as they work to "negotiate their viewing position in relation to this marginalisation of their desires" (75). Building on this work, I explore in this thesis the extent to which fans in this gendered age group can be understood to have internalised negative discourses and thus implicitly work to defend and legitimise their fan culture and pleasures, questioning how cultural discourses around fangirls and youth media come to shape tween fandom. In order to frame *iCarly* fans' defence and legitimisation of their culture and pleasures, it is crucial first to attend to the negative discourses that circulate around their fan objects and the small body of work that has considered girls' fandom and teen media. Accordingly, in this section I draw on work from both fan studies and girls' studies.

Girls' Fan Objects: Devaluation by Default

Girls' media objects, or media which is targeted to them at least, are generally assumed to be shallow and vapid, and hence devoid of 'authentic meaning'. Any perceived feminisation of a fan object is usually grounds for dismissal (Bury 2005; Jenkins 2006a[1995]; Williams 2011a; 2011b) and an object further delegitimised by its association with teenage girls (Nash and Lahti 1999). The emphasis on fangirls' sexuality is also mobilised to devalue their fannish objects as they are invariably dismissed as being popular solely on the supposed (hetero)sexual attraction girls feel towards the (male) star attached to the text. These judgements are inherently misogynistic (usually heteronormative) and presuppose that the text in question is devoid of any artistic merit or 'value' based on perceptions of its audience who are considered to be incapable of enjoying, or even recognising, 'quality' media. As Anne Morey (2012a) notes in relation to *Twilight*, when the 'implied reader' is a young female "questions of taste become more political" (6) than they would be for other forms of popular culture that do not have a predominantly female fan base. What is at stake here, and often the outcome of such judgements is that in-depth inquiries into the appeal of girls' fannish texts, or formal analyses of them are hard to come by (Click 2009). This in turn, allows perceptions of these texts and their audiences to continue unchallenged, and thus likely further discouraging future analyses. In what follows, I consider the marginalised place of teen fandom within fan studies and girls' studies, and how assumptions and stereotypes of young female fans can be seen to structure these analyses.

Teen Fandom and Corporate Control in Fan Studies

In the introduction to *Fandom*, Gray et al. (2007) refer to teen fandoms as an "inevitably missing genre" (16). Although this statement may be intended as a disclaimer, to acknowledge which fans or fandoms have been omitted from the edited collection, this revealing statement is never explored or expanded on; teen fandom is simply, unquestionably, and *inevitably* missing with no qualification offered for its designation as 'inevitable'. It is thus implied that its absence is unavoidable and even expected, which in turn speaks volumes about the genre's apparent value or status

within the field.[35] Why are teen fandoms *inevitably* missing, and how are they valued? To explore this question, I first consider teen fandom in fan studies and then move on to girls' studies.

Explorations of teen fandoms within fan studies have often focused on commercialised, officially sanctioned fannish spaces (Brooker 2001; Hills 2004; Stein 2011b).[36] Whilst I acknowledge the importance of exploring the ways in which fandom operates in the context of the media industry's co-option of fan culture, it is unfortunate that grassroots fan communities occupied by young fans are relatively unexplored. In the absence of much acknowledgement that young female fans and/or fangirls create their own communities, or perform fandom outside official boundaries, the historical association of (young) femininity with passivity and conformity, and young people as vulnerable to the power of the media is inadvertently re-established. Moreover, it places girls' fandom into a vacuum that denies girls agency and depletes them of any resistant/negotiative capabilities.[37] In this sense, it is arguable that in the context of young female fans, fan studies itself is still upholding the oppositions of resistance/conformist and authenticity/inauthenticity to which gendered notions of subculture/mainstream can be mapped on to.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, agency and resistance are absolutely key in this context since young people, and girls in particular, have rarely been associated or attributed with either historically. The increasing involvement of producers in fandom, as well as the increase in ancillary content that prioritises authorial voices does have the potential to affect girls' agency, and indeed, as Scott (2011) has argued, the mainstreaming of fan culture is particularly gendered, with fangirls and their practices remarginalised within this context (see Chapter Two). Explorations of fans' engagement in official spaces thus absolutely merit academic attention, particularly in the context of negative stereotypes of the fangirl; in fact, Schneider's Blogspot, the space explored in Chapter Three, is an official space. As both Chapter Two and Three

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[35] Academic work on Teen TV as a whole, not only teen fandom is scarce, with no book-length studies and two edited collections (Ross and Stein 2008a; Davis and Dickinson 2004).

[36] Notable exceptions include Gillan (2008) and Kohnen (2008) who consider teen TV fandom in LJ communities, and Stein (2008) who focuses on fanfiction.

[37] This is not intended to suggest that occupying a non-official fandom space is necessarily resistant in and of itself, but such spaces and the wider range of fan practices that may take place within them are likely endowed with more resistant potential (the format/structure of official sites usually constrains what fans can do on them according to the interests of the producers).

illustrate, the heightened visibility of fans and fan practices may heighten the propensity for shame and have implications for fan-fan relations. However, without exploring grassroots communities as a point of comparison, girls' agency may be rendered invisible and thus further denied, and their fandom comparatively delegitimised as 'inauthentic'.

Will Brooker's (2001) study on *Dawson's Creek* and Louisa Stein's (2011b) study on *Kyle XY* are solely concerned with analysing the series' official spaces and the opportunities for fannish-like engagement they provide. While Brooker fails to acknowledge that teenage fans may resist the official space, or play outside the boundaries of the text in question, Stein claims that more *Kyle XY* fans congregate on the ABC Family created site than they do on non-official spaces such as LJ, and LJ fans were excluded from the study. In both cases then, leaving fan-created spaces unexplored, it is implied that fans occupying alternative spaces are rare, and thus portrays the "corporate-sponsored, -promoted, and -guided version of fannishness" (Stein 2011b, 128) as irresistible for young fans; indeed, this version of fannishness is "packaged *as* contemporary youth identity" (ibid, my emphasis). Moreover, Stein goes so far as to argue that "the construction of the Millennial fan/viewer may ultimately be more appealing to corporate interests because it offers a more predictable, less potentially transgressive version of media investment than the—at times—infamous media fan" (132). Thus, suggesting that corporations themselves consider this generation of fans as more compliant and conventional than (presumably older) media fans 'proper'.

Official spaces are considered as 'less authentic' since they are "shaped from 'above'" (Brooker 2001, 468), rather than originating from grassroots, and thus they are always positioned in opposition to 'authentic' and 'legitimate' fandoms. In a reading of Stein's article, Roberta Pearson (2010) suggests that "media corporations promote '*inauthentic*' modes of engagement to tame media fans and boost corporate profits" (92, my emphasis), though Stein does not designate them explicitly as 'inauthentic'. Corporate fandom is seen to create a "'false' sense of personal agency… [and] a 'false' sense of community" (ibid), both of which are central to fannish pleasures and enjoyments. Busse (2007b) argues that fandom "requires a community and participation in that community—and possibly self identification with that community"

(n.p), and corporate-created communities do not offer a 'real' sense of community. While I agree with Busse's argument, in the context of fangirls in particular, I do not agree with Pearson that, if indeed an official space offers fans the opportunity to interact (the official *iCarly* website does not provide a space for fans to openly communicate), the sense of community is 'false', and fans cannot authentically or meaningfully engage with the text or each other.[38] Equally, if community and communication with other fans is as central to fandom as Busse argues, fans are likely to retreat to other spaces if there is not adequate provision for such interaction on official sites. Acknowledging that not all fans are equally confined, and that young (female) fans can resist incorporation, create their own communities, and enact agency is especially pertinent to my work on *iCarly* fans, who formed many sub-communities in various different spaces.

The opportunities for participation offered by official sites are not without critique however. Pre-packaged fannishness, guided by corporations and promotional paratexts is, as stated above, thought to be designed to tame fans, keeping them within official boundaries, and thus constraining fans' play with, or resistance to the text (Brooker 2001; Stein 2011b); thereby predominantly marginalising fangirl modes. Furthermore, user-generated content can be exploited for profit and function as free-labour (Levin Russo 2009; Martens 2011), and the provision of extra-textual content such as character blogs, that privilege the authorial voice and mimic fan practices, can decrease fan pleasure and inhibit fangirl practices particularly by filling in narrative gaps and inhibiting fan speculation (Pearson 2010; Scott 2007a; 2007b; 2008). Indeed, fans author their own character blogs (Stein 2006) and create social networking profiles based on fictional characters (Booth 2008) that function as a cross between RPGs (role-playing games) and fanfiction, and thus similar storytelling formats authored by producers may 'tread on the toes' of popular fan practices or inhibit fans from producing their own interpretations. Yet, just because these opportunities to engage with such texts are available to fans, does not mean that all fans embrace them, or that fans cannot further play with, transform, and make meaning from the ancillary

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[38] See: Ali (2009a; 2009b) and Zweenik and Gatson (2002) on the official *Buffy* posting board, 'The Bronze'.

content offered to them.[39] Stein (2011b) argues that scholarship should consider how we value media consumers' work in pre-packaged spaces, and I agree this is important; however I would argue that fan engagement in these spaces should be valued for what it is in its own right, rather than contrasted with grassroots fandom and found lacking, and the fans that visit them subtly positioned as malleable dupes.

In an analysis of *Dawson's Creek* fandom, Hills (2004) distinguishes teen fandom from other, supposedly more legitimate fandoms by designating it as 'mainstream cult'; not intrinsically 'anti-mainstream' or necessarily equated with 'minority' fan tastes, but instead "co-opted as part of a recognisable consumerist option" (66). Hills argues that 'cult' fandoms "construct their own intertextual links between programmes (65), while 'mainstream cult' fandoms "largely follow intertextual links put in place by the media industry to court such fans" (ibid). Similar to Stein (2011b), it thus sets up a generational and gendered division between 'mainstream' and 'cult' fans, reiterating problematic binaries that map subversive/resistant onto active reading, and compliant/predictable onto passive reading, at least insofar as mainstream fans conform to the paths imposed upon them (e.g. ships that were explicitly built-in to the narrative) and that were created to attract them in order to profit from them. Since there is no acknowledgement in Hills' work of fans supporting non-canon ships, the implication is that teen fans merely accepted the dominant position prescribed by the narrative and did not construct their own preferences or expand the text.[40]
Although Hills illustrates that the series shares similar characteristics to 'cult' TV, it is not clear why a teen show needs to be assessed and evaluated on this basis. The analysis does not elevate the text or attribute it with somehow greater value by its association with 'cult', but instead emphasises the ways in which the text seemingly interpellates/exploits its comparably 'unresistant' audience, and thus both the text and its fans are found lacking. Moreover, due to the gendered nature of both 'mainstream'

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[39] iCarly.com included blogs for the central characters, available at: http://origin.www.icarly.com/iBlogs/index.html. Fans' opinions and uses of them varied, from total rejection, to negotiations of their canonical status, to embracing them as extra creative content for more, better 'accurate' fanfiction.

[40] Jones & Pearson (2004) have similarly reified distinctions between 'cult' TV fandom and other TV fandoms on the basis of what they term 'text-producing' fan cultures. In order to illustrate this distinction, the authors position the 'cult' series *Star Trek* against the sitcom *Friends* (1994-2004), claiming that while the latter may attract larger audiences, it does not inspire "significant interpretive fan cultures" (x). This formulation presupposes that fan culture is tied to a specific genre and that fan culture itself is also only one thing, therefore precluding other forms of fan cultures and their texts from an in-depth scholarly analysis, such as a tween sitcom. On the contrary, many TV shows that would not be considered 'cult' according to their definition are text-producing fandoms and 'significance' is a problematically subjective measure of a fandom.

and 'cult', the term could be understood to summon yet another distinction, one that connotes, patronisingly, 'mainstream cult' as 'cult for girls'. There is also a sense in which defining a teen series (one that is culturally devalued primarily by its association with young female audiences) as 'mainstream cult' can be seen as a way of attempting to legitimise girls' fandom, and the study of it, by aligning or likening it with the 'masculinity' of 'cult'. Yet, in distancing the text from its feminisation in this way it hides or erases the 'femininity' of its fandom, and suggests that in fact, distancing (or 'masculinisation') is *necessary* in order to be considered legitimate. Opting to 'be one of the boys', so to speak, does little to challenge the hierarchical and gendered relations that continue to sustain girl's culture as a ridiculed or devalued form.

Girls' Fandom in Girls' Studies

In contrast to the discourses of inauthenticity that attach to official fan spaces in fan studies, girls' scholarship that has considered girls' uses of websites created for them (rather than by them) has highlighted the various significant and meaningful ways that girls make use of these spaces (Grisso and Weiss 2005; Mazzarella and Atkins 2010; Polak 2006). Although the websites in these analyses were not fan spaces, such work is significant in suggesting that girl fans can equally make meaningful and 'authentic' engagements with the text, each other, or even the producers in corporate spaces. Researchers in girlhood have also begun to consider girls as producers, exploring girls' relationships to digital technology including YouTube (Banet-Weiser 2011), and blogs/homepages and social networking (boyd 2008; Kearney 2006; Mazzarella 2005a; 2010; Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004; Ryan Vickery 2010). The work of Susannah Stern (1999; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2008) focusing on girls' home pages and the ways in which these spaces function as forms of identity expression and self-disclosure paved the way in this regard.

Stern (2002) argues that "attention to adolescent female home page authors is especially important to study given the traditional emphasis on adolescent girls' loss of voice" (226; see Chapter Four). Similarly, given the relative lack of teenage/girl fan

voices, and in-depth considerations of the meanings of fandom during adolescence[41] as a period of developmental transition (Zittoun 2006), in Chapter Four I focus on fans' self-narratives and Tumblr as a space apt for identity expression and exploration through a re-consideration of bedroom culture (McRobbie and Garber 2000[1976]). Stern (2002) outlined four factors which may account for the internet as an appealing (and public) place for adolescent girls and self-disclosure that are also applicable in the context of *iCarly* fans and Tumblr fandom: communicating with a wider network of others, interacting with like-minded others, controlling the image they project through which they may potentially experience a heightened sense of power over their communication, and disclosing information anonymously to other anonymous people.[42]

Surprisingly, despite the flourishing area of scholarship in girls' studies concerned with girls' making media (Kearney 1998; 2006) there has been scant attention paid to girls' online fandom—a primary space where girls can be found making media and openly discussing their reception of popular culture. Much of the existing work on girls' fandom thus far is in relation to fan fiction (Black 2008; Warburton 2010), girls' idolisation of particular (predominantly male) musicians, actors or celebrities (Hackmann 2005; Karniol 2001; Raviv et al. 1996), or a mixture of various discourses via McRobbie's (2000[1977]) code of 'romantic individualism' (Mazzarella 2005b; Scodari 2005). Although Mazzarella's (2005b) chapter 'Claiming a Space: The Cultural Economy of Teen Girl Fandom on the Web' provides a somewhat predictable, yet detailed, analysis of girl-created websites devoted to a male teen TV star, Mazzarella's conclusion is significant. While the sites appear to replicate teen idol worship as traditionally evident in teen magazines, Mazzarella argues that to focus exclusively on this is to miss a crucial point; namely that girls are drawing on their technological expertise to create and maintain the sites in order to engage in a culturally denigrated activity. Indeed, much the same could be said for *iCarly* fans; it is not culturally 'legitimate' to be a fan of a tween sitcom, particularly when one is older than the tween demographic, hence their defence and legitimisation practices. Yet, in this way they can be understood, to some extent, to be resisting the cultural

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[41] Susan Murray's (1999) study of adolescent girl fandom and *My So-Called Life* (1994-1995) is one notable exception that considers girls' emotional discussions regarding the importance of the text's proximity to their lives.
[42] See also: Bell (2007).

devaluation of their interests. In the same volume, Gregson (2005) focuses on how girls relate to shoujo (a form of anime created by women for a female audience) and participate in online fan culture. While Gregson was initially drawn to the genre for the strong female characters, research found that instead girls' fan talk primarily focused on the male characters and romantic plot lines. Although there is an undeniable focus on romance within *iCarly* fandom, characterised as it is by shipping, contrary to Gregson's findings, fans focused more of their attention on Sam, the strongest of the two female characters, than they did discussing their attraction to the male characters (see Chapter Four).

Despite the calls within girls' studies for more work to concentrate on girls' responses to media texts, and listen to girls' opinions rather than focusing on scholarly analyses of the text, there have been no calls for further investigation into girls' media fandom practices in the online context. Dafna Lemish (2010) acknowledges that "Studying girls' Internet use as a form of 'participatory culture', (Jenkins, 2006[e]) offers one such direction for listening to girls" (xi), yet despite citing a fan scholar, this call has not been fully applied to explore girl fans within girls' studies. It is surprising that this area of study has been so overlooked since girls' fandom presents an opportunity to bring together several critical areas of research: girls' reception practices and/or engagement with media texts, (digital) media production, representations of girlhood on screen, and girls' online practices. Following McRobbie and Garber (2000[1976]), the notion of girls coming together through a 'shared interest' has continued to resonate in girl-centric research (Mazzarella and Pecora 2007). That fandom is a space specifically for fans to share their interest(s), would seem to be a fruitful arena in which to further explore girls' coming together, and which is also crucial, given Durham's (1999a) argument regarding the communitarian nature of girls' reading practices. Furthermore, fandom has been extensively discussed as a female space, a queer female space, and a space in which to explore and experiment with identity, all of which would seem to lend itself to an exploration of adolescent fans "for whom identity formation and conflict are most intense" (Scheiner 2000, 119). Throughout this chapter, I have argued for fan studies to take note of the work within girls' studies that contradicts many of the assumptions that I propose have contributed to girls' marginalisation within fan scholarship. However, I also argue that girls' studies would do well to engage more closely with scholarship on fans and fandom to continue to

explore girls' historical and contemporary fan cultures. This is even more important given that work on teen fandoms within fan studies, as discussed above, has largely considered them through such a narrow lens.

Conclusion

Although, as I have discussed in this chapter, there is a small body of work that considers fans of teen texts/young female fans, there still remains little academic work that takes girls on their own terms. Despite the importance of fandom to identity construction, together with its importance to those disempowered by a combination of age and gender, girl fans have largely been left unaccounted for in fan studies. Moreover, those that are already disempowered by age and gender are consistently devalued on that basis within fandom by other fans, cast to the lowest tiers of internal hierarchies and attributed little fan capital. Given the continued pathologisation of the fangirl and/or girl fans, I consider girls' fandom a feminist issue. Although scholarship may do little to challenge perceptions of the fangirl within fandom itself, in light of the negative stereotypes to which they are subject, and the ways in which girl fans themselves may seek distance from these stereotypes and cast them on to others, it is nevertheless crucial to take seriously fangirls and their fan cultures.

Methodology and Research Ethics

As the first half of this chapter made clear, the thesis overall is concerned with forging a dialogue between girls' studies and fan studies. However, I draw upon a range of interdisciplinary frameworks and my use of theory is multifaceted; I use different theorists to draw out the particularities of each site ranging across the areas of cultural psychology, criminology, cultural studies, sociology, and feminist media studies. Likewise, this thesis draws on a variety of methodological approaches. In this section I discuss each aspect of the mixed-methods approach I took in terms of gathering and analysing data, the benefits and limitations of approaches, and the ethical considerations involved. I begin by discussing methods as they relate to the thesis overall and move on to those that relate to individual chapters. I then discuss my personal investment in the project and my own relationship to this fandom and fandom more broadly, "making explicit rather than implicit the ways in which locations of identity and emotional registers inform research choices and processes" (Monaco 2010, 102). It is important to acknowledge one's own perspective in the context of fan studies since "the question of whether scholars are fans themselves, or whether they study fandom as something that others do, has profound theoretical and methodological implications" (Sandvoss 2005, 5). The final section outlines the ethical issues involved in the particular methodological approaches I have chosen to take.

Methodology

This thesis takes a multi-sited approach, using empirical data gathered from online interaction across three *iCarly* fan groups. The case study chapters are based on non-participatory observation and analysis and throughout, fans are analysed as performers and fan discourse is analysed as a text. In so doing, the thesis combines a constant comparative method with discourse analysis, examining patterns of language and its relationship to the contexts in which it is used.[43] Following Michel Foucault, a discourse analytic perspective emphasises the idea that discourse does not simply reflect meanings or 'reality', but the meanings of 'reality' are constructed through

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[43] See: Paltridge (2012).

discourse.[44] Accordingly, fan comments are analysed in terms of "what is behind the explicitly written" (Ang 1985, 11) and considered performative, rather than accepted at face value.[45] As "people use language to *do* things" (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 32), fan discourse is understood to perform particular social functions such as produce and construct (fan) identity, impression manage (Goffman 1959), identify "insiders and outsiders", and form hierarchies (Hine 2000, 18).

Multi-sited Approach

Work in fan studies has largely concentrated on a single text or single fan space at any one time. Although there have been studies that adopt a multi-sited approach, these either conducted research in a mixture of online (electronic bulletin boards) and offline (fan club and magazine) spaces (Bielby et al. 1999), or explored different online communities attached to different fan objects (Whiteman 2007) and across different platforms (mailing lists, forums, and LiveJournal) (Chin 2010). In the age of social media fan culture is increasingly fragmented, with fans occupying multiple spaces simultaneously, moving across and between platforms, from Twitter to Tumblr to Instagram. As Lucy Bennett (2014) acknowledges, "to remain fully informed, many fans need to negotiate and straddle all the different media platforms that have a fan, object of fandom, or official channel, presence" (8). This multiple 'occupancy' can pose quite a challenge for researchers, and Bennett (2014) questions whether—in the context of digital fandom—research that focuses on one space and the practices within it may produce a "restrictive snapshot" (12). Although it could be argued that exploring multiple spaces may offer an equally restricted snapshot, producing a series of less in-depth analyses of each space, I contend that such an approach is central to understanding the nature of fandom in digital culture. Exploring fans of the same object in different spaces enables a consideration of how, and in what ways, the construction, practices, and performances of fandom may (or may not) shift according to the context in which they are located, as well as contextualising inter-fandom relations. In the context of multi-fandom spaces such as Tumblr, fans are perhaps less strictly divided according to their fan object, but I would suggest, with fandom(s) spread out over a greater number of platforms, fans are increasingly more divided

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[44] See: Bury (2005, 6); Hine (2000, 53); Potter and Wetherell (1987); Thomas (2007, 19-22).
[45] See: Crowther (1999); Hills (2002, 65-71).

across the platforms that they occupy. Tensions tend to arise between fans across different spaces as they each imagine the other to perform and practice fandom in different ways and shame and police them accordingly. In light of this, I consider *iCarly* fans across three co-existing online spaces in order to examine the various ways in which fangirl identities are practiced, imagined, and policed, and how negotiations of 'fangirl' may shift in different contexts.

Multi-sited approaches have potential for "gain[ing] [a] more comprehensive understanding (Marcus 1995)" (Lotz and Ross 2004, 510) of the research object "by building a multilayered narrative that develops the larger social context of a community under study (Marcus 1998)" (Gatson 2011, 248). By examining *iCarly* fandom using three data sites, as well as multiple methods to construct a 'multilayered narrative' of the larger social context of the fandom, I seek to illustrate the potential for a more comprehensive understanding of tweendom fan culture(s), as well as to suggest variations and differences in terms of how fangirl fandom is performed, constructed, defended, and legitimised across the three spaces. George E. Marcus (1995) notes "multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations… with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites" (105). Likewise, the multiple fan sites I focus on are clearly connected and follow a chronological path, and the order of the chapters was designed to reflect the position (and movement) of fans (and to a lesser extent, the producer) in relation to the lifecycle of the text and events in *iCarly* fandom and in fan culture more broadly. In this context I draw on two techniques derived from ethnography for "generating a multi-sited terrain" (Marcus 1995, 110). Firstly, a "follow the people" (ibid, 106) technique, which follows the movements of, and explores what happens to, a particular group of subjects across multiple sites. Secondly, a "follow the conflict" (ibid, 110) technique, which traces the development of a conflict across multiple sites or the movement of people to other sites due to a conflict. This approach was appropriate here as it facilitated the exploration of inter-fandom dynamics/distinctions and the ways in which fans may distance themselves from negative fangirl stereotypes as part of their defence and legitimisation strategies.

The first case study focuses on one of, if not the, first prominent *iCarly* fan sites online, the LiveJournal (LJ) community, Groovy Smoothie (GS). I trace its rise and

fall, and the ways in which Schneider's arrival, a year after its opening, instigated inter- and intra-fandom distinctions. With the community fragmenting, I follow original GS members to iWankarly, an LJ community created in response to changes at the GS wrought by Schneider's presence and as a refuge from "newbie" fans. Schneider soon left LJ and created his own site on Blogspot. The second case study thus turns to Blogspot, in which I focus on fan criticism and defence in response to a controversial season four episode (and Schneider's justification of it) that represented/parodied *iCarly* fans. In this chapter, I undertake a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) of the episode in question; a method I will discuss later. Moving on to the third case study, I consider a fan-created survey that circulated on Tumblr in the days before the show's final episode. In answering questions, fans reflected on their experiences of becoming *iCarly* fans and the importance of the show/fandom to their own lives. Many *iCarly* fans moved from LJ/GS to Tumblr while the show was on air, and thus tracing fandom from LJ to Tumblr (via Blogspot) reflects this 'virtual' migration. This trajectory also reflects that of fan culture more broadly as many fandoms/fans have migrated from LJ to Tumblr in recent years (see Chapter Two).

Data Gathering and Analysis

The initial stage of the research approximated a snowballing methodology (Lindlof and Taylor 2011, 114-115) similar to the "exploratory process" outlined by Christine Hine (2000, 71), whereby "each activity and each new form of data [lead] to another" (ibid). Indeed, it was through this that the multi-sited approach developed. When I first began the primary data research for this thesis, I considered a Nickelodeon-owned message board, a number of fan-created message boards, and the *iCarly* wikia. These were either relatively inactive, ship-specific, or did not contain sustained interaction (i.e. only one-off, one sentence comments). However, these led me to other fan spaces, as a number of fans belonged to more than one community and talked about them in their posts. Although driven by my research questions, during this stage, as Hine describes, "it was a question of using an ethnographic sensitivity to follow leads which looked interesting" (71). Through this method I discovered the GS, and while there were a number of communities related to *iCarly* on LiveJournal, I chose the GS because it was not a practice specific site (i.e. fan fiction or RPG), nor ship or

cast member specific: it was the only *iCarly* "anything goes" community. When I was researching in early 2013, the community had been inactive since November 2012.

Groovy Smoothie

The GS was a large online community with 2,386 journal entries and 28,380 comments posted between May 2008 and November 2012. I therefore had to set limits on which threads would be omitted from the initial exploration. In the first phase of research, I explored the most recent threads in the archive and made a list of episode discussion threads. A total of 63 (out of a possible 109) episodes were discussed. Whilst I read through all of the episode threads, notes were taken on only 23 of the most popular discussions. These discussions were those that were concerned with ship-heavy episodes (i.e. a friendship turned romantic) or episodes that clearly foreground issues of age/gender in the narrative. For example, in 'iMake Sam Girlier' (2.16), 'tomboy' Sam is concerned she is not 'girly' enough to get a date with her boy crush and enlists Carly's help in acting and appearing more 'girly'. At the beginning of my research, my initial aims were to explore feminist discourses, in so far as I wanted to consider how fans regarded gender representation in *iCarly* and the relationship between this discussion and feminism. However, I came to discover that fans generally did not explicitly discuss the show in these terms, and issues of gender were not explicit in fan talk. Thus, my approach shifted to consider how gender can be seen to be articulated, constructed through, and shaped in online interactions. My thesis is thus feminist in intent, more than fan comments are explicitly feminist in content. This raises questions about my own position as a (feminist) researcher, that is, the power relations and political tensions inherent in this move; a point I explore in more detail below.

In the second phase of research (2014), having learnt that the producer had been a member at the community, I decided to take a diachronic approach to explore the nature and structure of the space and fans' performances before Schneider's arrival, how these shifted during his stay, and after he left. In light of my research questions, a diachronic approach was appropriate for this case study as I felt that fans' defence and legitimisation strategies would be particularly urgent in the presence of the producer. In order to contextualise these strategies it was important to compare fan activity pre-

Schneider to identify the nature/extent of any changes. I was also concerned with exploring any changes in how fans engaged/identified with *iCarly* pre- and post-Schneider, that is, in what ways fans may constitute their pleasures differently in the context of the producer's presence. In turn, this may shed light on fangirl performances as they were variably constructed, negotiated, and made in/visible.

In constructing a timeline of key events and discussions (Figure 1.1) fluctuations in fan activity/comment posting could be logged, and changes in the nature of comments and fan-fan relations could be traced and understood within the wider context of events in the community. In tracing GS history, I set more precise boundaries around which threads to explore. My sampling strategy discounted posts regarding fan fiction and other cultural production (e.g. icons), and threads regarding the actors and their careers. I discounted fan works because I was concerned with analysing 'enunciative productivity' (Fiske 1992): forms of social interaction, and verbal exchange between fans (Baym 2000; Sandvoss 2005), which Fiske suggests is one of the main pleasures of fandom. I discounted discussions about the actors as I was concerned specifically with *iCarly* fandom, rather than fannish attachment to the actors specifically. Although celebrity attachment, or interest in the actors is part of *iCarly* fandom, it was not the primary mode of engagement in the communities that I looked at.

September 8th 2007	*iCarly* first episode.
May 22nd 2008	GS opens.
March 6th 2009	Schneider joins GS.
April 9th/10th 2009	"Epic" ship tease on Twitter/ Schneider concerned with "reputation" seeks advice from GS.
May 7th 2009	Discord regarding Schneider's presence discussed on Fandom Secrets: link posted to GS.
July 2009	Heavier moderation at GS due to ship wars (escalates again in August).
August 14th 2009	Schneider's last post at GS.
August 31st 2009	Discord regarding Schneider's presence discussed on Fandom Secrets: link posted to GS.
September 2nd 2009	Schneider's first Blogspot post/ GS discovers all content from his LJ account is deleted.
September 14th 2009	First link to Tumblr blog posted on GS (gifs begin appearing shortly before).
September 22nd 2009	iWankarly opens. (Two other communities created by GS 'natives' appear shortly after).
September 24th 2009	Schneider confirms departure from GS on Blogspot

Figure 1.1: Timeline of events for the GS.

Beginning with the first year of posting, I systematically read through the post archives, noting important dates, moments of celebration, hype, conflict, and critical

discussion. Familiar with the development of the community, I decided to focus the chapter on key 'destabilising' occurrences (Whiteman 2007) in this timeline, analysing events sequentially, as they related to Schneider's absence/presence**.** This was in order to explore shifts in fans' negotiation of fangirl stereotypes and performances in the context of (potential) shame wrought by the producer's presence.

First, I traced the establishment of the community between May 2008-August 2008 when it reached 100 members. I considered (unlocked) discussion posts located on the moderators' journals (sourced via hyperlinks posted at the GS) that led up to the creation of the GS, and posts in affiliated LJ communities owned by GS moderators. This enabled me to gain a better understanding of the motivations behind the creation of the GS, the 'founders' pleasures in the text, the reading and interpretive strategies which came to shape those established at the GS (at least initially), and the dynamics between this group of fans. The second key moment included threads posted just prior to Schneider's unveiling in March 2009 until he left in August 2009. During this period, the number of posts and comments increased dramatically, and taking a month-by-month view, threads were selected based on perceived relevance of the thread name or by the number of comments posted. The third moment concerned the breakdown of the community after Schneider's departure between August 2009-December 2009. Busy threads within the GS, and those at Fandom Secrets (an anonymous LJ community) and iWankarly (via links posted at the GS) were considered in this time frame. Posting then decreased dramatically in 2010 and I only examined the thread on 'iStart a Fanwar' (iSAFW) (included in the BS chapter) and the final posting to the community in November 2012. Threads that were considered for analysis were bookmarked on an internet browser (190), with a further selection saved and downloaded as PDFs (134) in the event that the archive would be unexpectedly deleted.

I also performed a keyword search for 'fangirl' and 'feminism' within the GS archives. The search for 'feminism' and 'feminist' did not yield any results, however, one thread was discovered that used the word 'feminist' and thus the search function on LJ did not appear particularly sensitive nor reliable. Nevertheless, this confirmed to me that explicit discourses regarding feminism were not as 'naturally' occurring as I initially thought they might be. A search for the word 'fangirl' in the GS rendered a

total of 42 results (maximum), but once more the search function was unreliable as on other occasions it only yielded 6 results. Working with the 42 results, I identified that the term was used in a variety of ways (applied to self or other, as noun or verb), and with varying degrees of identification, ambivalence, humour, and contempt. These results were then categorised and analysed using a constant comparative method derived from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Dey 2010; Lindlof and Taylor 2011).

The constant comparison method is used to draw out similarities and differences in the data, through comparison, in order to generate and refine concepts and theories (Bryant and Charmaz 2010). Categories are based on units of data identified "as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon" (Spiggle 1994, 493). Thus, for example, by comparing instances of use of 'fangirl', search results were coded into (indiscrete) categories: gender, age, positive self-identification, distanced self-identification, self-disidentification, and 'Othered' disidentification. These 'fangirl' categories "form[ed] the analytical bones of the analysis, later fleshed out by identifying and analysing in detail their various properties and relations" (Dey 2010,168) and their functions in context (i.e. generating a fangirl hierarchy, inter-/intra-fandom distinctions), which in turn generated a theory of how 'fangirl' was varyingly constructed in this space. Creating these 'fangirl' categories led by verbal references, and doing a thematic analysis, enabled me to identify patterns, meanings and functions of use, associated language, and in what contexts (and ways) the word was used. In so doing, it enabled me to identify instances whereby the term, although not verbally referenced, can be understood to have been implicitly referenced or invoked in similar ways for similar purposes/functions. These observations of unspoken references to the term (based on concepts, constructs and characteristics related to it) could then be analysed within the same categories I devised based on the verbal references. Having discussed the first case study, I now turn to the second.

Blogspot

In the very early stages of the project, I researched Dan Schneider's career at Nickelodeon and his online presence in order to contextualise my understanding of his

performed persona when he interacted with fans, and quickly discovered his Blogspot. Reading through the blog posts and after having spent several months researching *iCarly* communities and reading message boards, I became aware of the controversy surrounding the episode 'iStart a Fan War' (iSAFW) amongst *iCarly* fans across the internet. I chose to focus the Blogspot chapter on the post dedicated to the episode as it provided an opportunity to examine fans' responses to their (stereotyped) construction and the fan/producer relationship during a moment of conflict, which would in turn, shed some light on fans' defence and legitimisation practices.

In order to contextualise fan comments, I felt that the much-debated episode would warrant some description and analysis. However, such an analysis clearly poses tricky methodological issues. Although I contend that the analyses of fan objects should be more sufficiently integrated into research in this field, a textual analysis does not traditionally account for reader responses and thus may inadvertently divorce the text under analysis from the fan readers engaging with it. In work on women's magazines, and following Joke Hermes (1995), Brita Ytre-Arne (2011) suggests "there can be substantial differences between the interpretations made by audiences and the interpretations made by researchers conducting textual analysis" (213), and there is a long history of debate within audience studies about the power differentials inherent in the positioning of scholar and participant (the object of the research). As such, textual analysis and empirical audience research have infrequently been brought together. Accordingly, in a bid to address these tensions, Ytre-Arne (2011) proposes a form of 'reader-guided' textual analysis, in which text and audience perspectives are combined, with the focus on "the dimensions that readers define as important to their experience… allow[ing] for [a] close examination of the interplay between text and readings" (214). I suggest that an analysis that is reader-guided has the potential for a more in-depth exploration of fan representations, taking into account the nuances, similarities, and differences in fans' responses to particular elements of the text.

Of the posts on Blogspot, the iSAFW entry garnered the most comments from fans. Fan comments on the iSAFW post were copy-pasted into MS Word and printed in late 2012, totalling 65 (A4) pages. The data gathered from Blogspot provided some of the first material I found and this printout is all that now remains of the archive; upon returning to the site in the second phase of the research process, Schneider's blog had

been redesigned, and all fan comment sections had been removed. As Natasha Whiteman (2007) argues, "the stability of… data cannot… be taken for granted. The problems of dealing with the "fleeting" permanence of websites (Schneider and Foot 2004) introduce particular problems for archiving" (67). Unfortunately, I did not anticipate the potential for archive deletion at this early stage, and an error was made early on that could not be corrected; comments posted in response to other comments do not automatically expand and were not printed. In the early stages of research, I printed two pages of selected expanded comments and wrote out a further two pages by hand, but the total comments I have access to (300) still does not equal that originally stated on the website (329). It was not until discovering the archives had been deleted that I considered using the internet archive, 'Wayback Machine' to save (rather than bookmark) a web page. Through the Wayback Machine, I was able to screenshot the original layout of the website via one archived page, but comments on the iSAFW post could not be retrieved. Likewise, it was not possible to obtain the missing expanded comments, nor to conduct further research on any of the fans that had posted comments.

Fan comments on Blogspot were read through four times, annotated, and categorised using the constant comparative method as described above. In this instance, categorisation was both inductive (emergent themes identified in the data) and deductive (shaped by pre-existing concepts and theoretical frameworks, as well as categories set up by fans/the producer within the data itself). As some fan responses were several paragraphs long, categories were not distinct to individual fans, as any one passage could "exemplify different categories of interest…and thus have multiple labels" (Spiggle 1994, 493). Categories were organised according to tone of comment (e.g. positive, apologetic, critical, hedged, ambivalent) and content of comment (e.g. particular moments in the episode, opinions regarding narrative/ship development, responses to Schneider's justification, fan distinctions and shaming of self and Other, and uses of pathologising language). In the final part of this section I now turn to the third case study.

Tumblr

Aware of the growing popularity of Tumblr amongst *iCarly* fans and in fan culture more broadly, I decided early on that it would be important to conduct research on this platform. While Tumblr has been much discussed at the fan studies conferences (Fan Studies Network 2013; 2014; 2015) I have attended during my research period, and it is undeniable that fan scholars are keenly aware of the changing landscape of fan cultures in the context of Tumblr, academic literature in this field has not widely caught up with this development in fandom. Although in-depth studies of Tumblr are needed in order to more fully assess in what ways and to what extent fan culture has (or has not) shifted in the context of social media, the relative lack of studies may be due to the particular methodological implications that Tumblr engenders. Tumblr is decentralised in nature, with no central hub where fans communicate, such as a message board, and thus the platform poses a challenge for research.

I began searching by using the *iCarly* hashtag and through this, I found the '13 days of iCarly' hashtag. Rather than selecting a sample of disparate blogs, the hashtag provided the closest to that of a relatively contained group. Reflecting a period of intensified online activity, debate, and response within fandom, the tag contained an abundance of written content, which was significant in my decision to choose this data as Tumblr is particularly image-heavy. A search for this tag generated over 160 (A4) pages of commentary, totaling over 60,000 words, with the longest post over 2350 alone. The tag was displayed in reverse chronological order and saved as a PDF. It was then printed on to paper, read-through three times at different stages of the research process, annotated, and analysed.

A spreadsheet was created in which demographic data was added where available: age/gender indicators, nationality/geographical location, connections between bloggers, and fannish cultural production practices. Such information, if not gathered directly from the tag was searched for on individual blogs. Some blogs did not include any information, and some had changed URLs with no forwarding URL provided, thus information could not be accessed. Such information, though not all nor explicitly presented here, was of particular importance in this context due to the nature of the chapter, focusing more precisely on the ways in which fans relate to *iCarly* in terms of their lived experience and gendered/generational subjectivities. The

spreadsheet was printed out across six sheets of paper with thirteen blank boxes for each blogger. For each of the thirteen questions posed in the challenge, abbreviated answers were noted in the appropriate column and colour-coded by manual methods (by hand).[46] This enabled me to see which fans, and how many, answered each of the questions (which were then tallied), how they were answered (e.g. images only, one or two succinct sentences, essay-form), and identify links, trends, and exclusions in content.

The data gathered on Tumblr is a very specific type of data, comprising a fan-created survey that is not 'naturally occurring' discourse in the same way as that in the other two chapters. Thus, while I observed without participating, as I will go on to discuss, fan discourse in this case study fits somewhere in-between 'intervening' and 'naturally occurring' data. Although the 13 days challenge was part of *iCarly* fandom I researched on Tumblr, there would not necessarily be any immediate or obvious congruence between the results delivered by the survey and my research questions. The survey, and the knowledge it sought to produce, was created by fans for fan purposes: to reminisce about their experiences and reflect on the development of the series, the characters, and indeed themselves over the five years *iCarly* had been on air. Nevertheless, it was precisely because they were in the process of this very self-conscious reflection that this fan survey yielded productive data for the themes of my analysis. The two questions I concentrate on—the first and last—I chose specifically as they related most closely to my interest in fans' pleasures in the text and the ways in which they relate to the show in the context of their own lives. Indeed, they were questions that I may have asked myself, had I chosen to intervene more directly. Moreover, fans' self-narratives produced for the survey are understood as highly performative (Crowther 1999; Hills 2005c; Scheidt 2006) and thus this data presents an occasion to examine a different kind of fangirl performance than those considered in the other chapters. Likewise, the absence of Schneider in this space offers an opportunity to examine fans' defence and legitimisation strategies in a different, 'fan-only', context, and thus consider the extent to which these strategies inform a fangirl performance and come to shape the landscape of tweendom without producerly presence.

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[46] See: Lindlof and Taylor (2011, 258-259).

As with the other chapters, I used a constant comparative method as part of my analysis of the two questions chosen. I categorised fan responses according to recurrent themes, sentiments expressed, and the ways in which they positioned themselves in relation to the fan object. I also considered fans' use of language across the tag as a whole as part of an analysis of fangirl performances on Tumblr. Although examples from the challenge inform and contain this analysis, my understanding of the linguistic aspect of (Tumblr) fangirl performances is rooted in, and illuminated by, my personal experiences as a fan on Tumblr over the last two years. It is to a discussion of my own fandom, and personal investment in this chosen area of study that I now turn.

Personal investment

> Feminism forces us to locate our own auto-biographies and our experience inside the questions we might want to ask, so that we continually do feel with the women we are studying... That said, feminism shouldn't be taken as a password misleading us into a false notion of 'oneness' with all women purely on the grounds of gender. No matter how much our past personal experience figures and feeds into the research programme, we can't possibly assume that it necessarily corresponds in any way to that of the research' subjects (McRobbie 1982, 52).

It seems only fitting in a thesis that considers fangirl shame, the meanings of fandom for girls and young women, and their identifications with fan objects, that I 'confess' to my personal investment in these themes and confront any shame I may have for my own fandom or 'fangirlism'. As noted earlier in this chapter, it is not uncommon for fan scholars to address their own subjectivity in relation to the media object being investigated; this is often framed in terms of one's participation in the fan culture under study. As Whiteman (2007) notes, "The need for legitimacy via participation is granted particular importance within fan studies research, where narratives of fannish involvement are often presented by academics as they declare their 'positionality' (Brooker 2000, 4)" (61). Although I did not participate in *iCarly* fandom, and would not necessarily identify as an *iCarly* fan (although I was especially intrigued by the show, hence chose to focus my thesis on *iCarly* fans, and continue to enjoy watching very much), I do identify as a fan (or aca-fan [Hills 2002]) of other media objects and have participated in other media fandoms. Indeed, my understanding of fandom and

fans has been enriched by my own fannish history and a range of past and present fannish activities and investments.

Matt Hills (2002) begins his monograph *Fan Cultures* by describing the sense of recognition he experienced when reading *Textual Poachers* for the first time and seeing his own experiences as a fan reflected in the literature. My adventures into fan studies were the distinct opposite. As I began researching I grew increasingly frustrated with a *lack of* recognition, with a shortage of sustained or overt engagements with both/either fans of typically teen-oriented media and teenage/girl fans. I have identified as a fan since I was a teenager, and the kinds of attachments and experiences I had then and have had since, as well as the kinds of media that I have been and continue to be a fan of (e.g. teen TV), I found to be distinctly absent in much of the literature (as discussed in the first half of this chapter).

As my own fan practices have broadened over the last few years while conducting this research, my sense of recognition and identification with the kinds of fan practices depicted in the literature has admittedly increased. Nevertheless, just as fans may rewrite texts and expand popular culture in lieu of representations that reflect their own identities, my wish to expand fan studies to reflect my own fannish identity and experiences, both past and present endure; studies of young female fans and teen-girl targeted texts or media objects associated with them remain scarce. Indeed, despite not directly interacting with the fans I researched, I felt an increasingly close affinity to some of them, seeing parts of myself reflected in the conversations and the ways in which they, and others like 'us', are underrepresented and deserve more recognition in the field.

I also feel very strongly about the policing and dismissal of girls' interests and fannish behaviour, and the almost 'lose-lose' culture in which girls are located, by which I mean, girls' and their interests are placed in two main boxes, and either way they cannot win. In one box, girls' interests are dismissed as too mainstream and stereotypical (i.e. girl-targeted media that is devalued by association) and the girl is ridiculed as a vapid, indiscriminate consumer and passive follower. In the other box, their interests are too obscure or decidedly *not* 'girly' (i.e. any media *not* distinctly targeted to girls), and the girl is considered a fake, a 'wannabe', and a 'try hard'

feigning interest in a culture they don't really know or understand, but claim to be a part of (e.g. the 'fake geek girl' rhetoric). Girls' are essentially delegitimised regardless of their particular interest(s) and no matter how they behave in response to it. Although my argument here refers to mainstream media and cultural constructions of girl fans, the relative lack of engagement with this demographic within fan studies specifically does suggest that little has been done to challenge these ideologies or to value girls' investments.

Mocking girls' (or anyone's) enthusiasm, and culture's seemingly implicit demand to act disaffected to be 'cool' or taken seriously makes little sense to me, particularly when, as self-proclaimed fangirl, Tavi Gevinson (2013) states that "being a fan can be the most 'happying' thing you can be" (n.p). At the same time, based on my own experiences, I also believe that fandom can perform particular and significant functions and hold distinctive meanings in youth development, especially during 'ruptures' or difficult times. As McRobbie suggests in the quote presented above, we cannot assume that our personal experiences *do* correspond to those of our research subjects, especially in those with feminist intent, where gender may feel like a stable and 'obvious' commonality. However, it is precisely my own fannish experiences and the significance of fandom in my own life that has guided my interest in these matters, informed the research questions I have explored, and impacted upon how I read and interpreted the results. This thesis is not intended to be an uncritical celebration of fangirls, but from a personal perspective, it was a way of giving voice to, or making more visible the voices of, girl fans, and taking them, and their interests, seriously.

I have always been a fan of something, ever since I was a small child; around the age of six, I hired *Sleeping Beauty* on video every week for months until I got my own copy. At nine, I pressed a stereo up to the TV to record the *Sound of Music* on to a cassette tape so I could 'watch' the film anywhere at all times. In the summer I turned eleven I transcribed, by hand, and learnt the entire script of *Clueless* (of which I can still recite the majority). However, it was not until I turned fourteen, and *Dawson's Creek* (DC) became my reason to be, that I would have called myself a fan. As a teen TV show primarily associated with teenage girls, it was of course distinctly uncool to be a fan of DC, particularly to the extent that I was. For years I was referred to by friends and family as a Dawson's Geek or Dawson's Freak, and the dismissal of my

fandom and the fan object—the (de)value surrounding it—was distinctly gendered (and age-related). Although I loudly proclaimed and performed fandom, my reasons for it, the meanings it held for me, and the uses it offered me were entirely mine, intensely personal, and never discussed with anyone, not even other fans. This is where I precisely differ from the fans studied here in the sense of situating, legitimating and defending my fan identity in a community context—I was a 'lone' fan. My fandom was, in many ways, structured by the silences that informed it. It was 1999 and dial-up internet was p-a-i-n-f-u-l-l-y slow, expensive, and prone to disconnect multiple times in one short sitting. I was aware of fan communities, but had I had better access, I still don't think I would have participated because my fandom was so bound up in my sense of myself: I couldn't stand outside it, and simply could not have shared it.

In season two, Andie, a new character to the show, was introduced and I related to her more than anybody before. The character of Andie was going through similar experiences to me then, dealing with bereavement, anxiety, and severe depression. Andie spoke words I wasn't ready to say, confronted distressing circumstances that I couldn't yet face, and described how I was feeling when I couldn't otherwise make sense of it. By talking about Andie, and speaking her words from the TV script that felt like they could have been written for me, I could talk about, and somehow experience my own pain from a safe distance via a character that felt like I did. She made me feel less alone—I wasn't the only one. As some fans in Chapter Three said of *iCarly*, DC literally 'saved my life'. During one of the most difficult periods of my life it was an emotional release, a form of therapy and a source of hope, as well as joy, and no more than when I visited Capeside (Wilmington, N.C) itself. It also changed my life on another level insofar as I first learnt of film studies because Dawson was a film student, and had it not been for watching the show, I may never have pursued media studies which is what started me on the road to where I am now today.

Since adolescence, fandom has performed crucial functions for me in times of distress and periods of personal growth. In this regard, researching and writing this thesis has been a cathartic experience, in so far as it pushed me to reflect on my past. But, it has also, of course, greatly affected my present in ways that I cannot begin to list. Suffice it to say, on a personal level, I have learnt a great deal from the research subjects

about myself, and through researching them, 'falling into' and becoming involved in another fan culture in my personal life (in ways that I had not before), has helped me to understand much about myself—past and present—as well as about being a fan. For these reasons, it has greatly impacted upon my reality, and sense of identity, as an adult**.**

As well as foregrounding my subjectivity however, it is also important to acknowledge the unequal power relations involved in audience research (as acknowledged above), not least of all in terms of my own privilege as an academic, educated, white woman. As McRobbie suggests in the quote used at the start of this section, feminists (although, arguably this is the case with all research) must acknowledge their own position in their research. Hermes (2005), Bordo (1995), and Harris (1999) for example, acknowledge the "lack of innocence" (Harris 1999, 20-21) in the selections of their research material, and how their own subjectivity affects interpretations of the data and thus the outcome of the project. These strategies are intended, as Harris (1999) notes "to deconstruct the notion of 'academic objectivity'" and... [no longer] conceal the self in writing" (146). Although it may succeed, to some degree, in emphasising closeness, doing so does not "circumvent that old ghost of paternalism" (Hermes 2005, 85). There still remains a tension, one that is not easily solved, in terms of the researcher positioned as 'expert critic' that 'knows' better than the research subjects and is apparently better positioned to decipher discourses that they are supposedly unaware of.

Hermes (2005), for example, has criticised Janice Radway's (1984) feminist analysis of women romance readers for implicitly insulting the participants by marking them as 'lesser feminists' for not attending to particular issues, or criticising the genre in ways it was thought they 'should'. In stating above that *iCarly* fans did not explicitly discuss the show in ways I thought they might (ways which relate to feminism and gender), I do not wish to imply that there was no engagement with feminism; there were explicit references to how some (not all) identified themselves as feminists. Altering the focus of my research was a move to take seriously fans pleasures in the text as they themselves discussed these pleasures in their talk and shared them together online. Reading fan discussions in terms of academic discourses of feminism and gender of course still places me in a position of power: I am still 'decoding' their

talk through particular intellectual frameworks which implies that it cannot be taken at face value – requiring the 'expertise' and cultural capital of the more 'enlightened' academic scholar.

Hermes (2005) argues "the power inherent in one's position as an academic needs to be wielded with care" (84), especially when researching questions of gender, and that "feminist research is synonymous with showing respect" (ibid). In this context, respect means to take seriously "the complexities of another persons life" (ibid) or experience. Exploring the many ways in which *iCarly* fandom appeared to be meaningful to fans—as based on the particular nature of their fan talk—can arguably be seen as showing more 'respect' than imposing one specific interpretive framework. Clearly, however, I cannot circumvent or solve the problem of the power imbalance between scholar and research subject, and the ways in which the fan's responses are made sense of, and viewed through, our "own conceptual constructs and ways of seeing the world" (Radway 1991, 5). But, I can reflect upon these issues and their implications in fan research of this nature (or that which intends to give 'voice' to fans), and explaining my personal connection with the project is part of this process.

Ethics

Conducting research that involves human subjects requires one to consider ethical obligations. As no one practice fits all studies (AOIR 2012; Bruckman 2002; Busse and Hellekson 2012; Ess and AOIR 2002; Gatson 2011; Herring 1996a; Lotz and Ross 2004), guidance was sought from my own institution,[47] and this thesis adheres to the ethical guidelines that were approved specific to this study.

Non-Participatory Observation

Although widely used within both fan and audience studies, non-participatory observation, or 'lurking', has been described as "virtual voyeurism" (Bell 2001, 198) and "parasitic" (Hills 2002, 173), with researchers positioned as "little better than spies" (Bakardjieva and Feenberg 2001, 234). Conversely, a number of scholars

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[47] UEA Research Ethics Policy located online at:
https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/251484/3124686/UREC%2BPolicy%2BJan%2B2012.pdf/17206b85-ff33-4e13-adb9-a10ee6f32d0f.

(Scodari 1998; 2005; Whiteman 2009; Williams 2011b; 2013) have occupied the "observation end" of participation in research (Whiteman 2009, 396) and argued that it is a valid and 'non-intrusive' method that suits the research context (Williams 2011b, 274). For Whiteman (2007):

> Arguments that configure lurking in [online] public settings as spying are undermined by the fact that the 'natural' state of engagement in these settings is shared invisibility: unless you make an utterance… you are not visible in the setting (88).

Indeed, as Sarah Gatson (2011) argues, "In a sense, all online ethnography is disguised observation, but it is not also necessarily deceptive observation" (252). As a method that is "in tune with the world in which we exist… Non participant observation… fits the local environment better than interviewing or any other method" (Leaning 1998 cited in Williams 2011b, 274-5). Crucially, "Unobtrusive observation… prevent[s] the researcher from 'muddying the waters'" (Whiteman 2007, 61), and avoids what Susan Herring (1996a) refers to as "the 'Observer's Paradox', that is, the problem of how to collect authentic data without the collection process interfering with the phenomena observed" (156).

The fan cultures that this thesis focuses on were largely inactive during the first and/or second stages of my research (2012-2013), which thus made participation/communication especially difficult. Nevertheless, given my interest in how fangirls defend and legitimise their culture, non-participatory observation was, I suggest, the most appropriate method. In an interview setting, fans may change their stance when asked to be self-reflexive (Duffett 2013), and they may become defensive and justify their fandom to a researcher (Hills 2002). In order to explore how fangirls (more than likely aware of their devaluation) defend and legitimise their fandom, and to consider to what extent these discourses pervade 'naturally occurring' fan talk (coming to structure fan[girl] performances in online fandom), I felt it important that, as a researcher, I did not intervene and potentially alter their behaviour. In order to obtain 'natural data' (Lotz and Ross 2004) without prompting responses (or potentially heighten defence/legitimisation strategies), I therefore chose to refrain from directly contacting specific online users and I did not actively participate in these forums.

Pseudonyms and Anonymity

Although all participants used pseudonyms, Amy Bruckman (2002) argues that these can "function similarly to real names, and should be treated in the same way one treats real names" (n.p). As such, I follow Bruckman's method of "light disguise" to protect the identities of those quoted in the thesis. Light disguise means that pseudonyms have been changed to protect individuals' anonymity but the group is named.[48] Unmasking the group "strengthens the quality of the scholarship by providing concrete detail… add[ing] informativity", and enables empirical claims of the work to be directly assessed (Herring 1996a, 159). In changing pseudonyms, I follow the same method as Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore and Rebecca Williams (2010) in naming fans by the space in which they were posted ('LJ' for LiveJournal, 'BS' for Blogspot, and 'TR' for Tumblr), followed by a number to distinguish between individuals according to order of appearance within their respective chapter. In the BS chapter, I refer to fans from LJ, and in the event that they were not already assigned an anonymous name in the previous chapter, the number assigned will simply follow on from the last LJ fan quoted. There is one exception to this method in Chapter Four in which I refer to a Tumblr user's pseudonym without disguise. They were not a member of *iCarly* fandom, but had written meta posts on the social network about Tumblr language. I corresponded with this author (22/4/15) and they gave me permission to cite their work and reference their pseudonym. In alignment with guidelines set by The Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), no URL is provided to permit the user a "modicum of privacy" (TWC Editor n.d, n.p),[49] but the date of post is cited.

Quoting, Citation, and Informed Consent

Bruckman (2002) states that one may quote from material freely without consent if "It is officially, publicly archived. No password is required for archive access. No site policy prohibits it" (n.p).[50] Each of the websites from which I have gathered data were publicly accessible without passwords and there were no privacy policies that would

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[48] URLs are not provided for the groups, except for Schneider's blog post examined in Chapter Three since fan comments are no longer accessible there.

[49] TWC Editor. n.d. "Submissions." *Transformative Works and Cultures*. http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions.

[50] See also: Beddows (2008).

prohibit quotation. Some scholars have argued that such openness can be understood as implied consent to observation (Ess 2001 cited in Whiteman 2007; Gatson 2011; Whiteman 2007); that "the author could not reasonably expect to exclude any person from gaining access to his or her words" (Reid 1996, 170). Indeed, in correspondence with the Chair of the General Research Ethics Committee at UEA (13/01/15) it was stated:

> the websites observed are public websites and such communications are neither private nor ephemeral it could be construed that commenting on such a website implies informed consent on behalf of the contributor and there are no intellectual property issues, I do not see that including the quotation is unethical (n.p).

Conversely, since the "authors" would not imagine their discourse to be used for research purposes, some scholars disagree with the stance that the public nature of websites constitutes informed consent (Dias 2003, 33; 42). Throughout the thesis I quote fans verbatim, as paraphrasing would likely alter the meanings and the researcher's subjectivity would become further implicated in terms of the ways in which quotations are altered. In this case, it would also render already marginal voices silent, and contravene a foundational intent of this thesis to take seriously and make 'audible' the voices of young female fans.

That said, I found that there were still limits regarding what information felt comfortable and ethical to present. Contrary to claims that by observing from a distance researchers may not remain aware "there are people on the 'other side' of their data" (Boehlefeld 1996, 141), I felt especially aware throughout the process that there were 'real' people behind the utterances and valued them accordingly. In certain cases then, sensitive or potentially sensitive information such as that related to participants' personal circumstances, was omitted, regardless of whether it may have enriched the analysis.[51] Although I did not participate in the fan cultures I discuss here, I spent upwards of two years immersed in the archives and longer examining the data gathered, and I began to feel a sense of knowing and/or identifying with certain participants. Nevertheless, as an observer I do not 'know' the participants and thus judgments regarding what could be potentially sensitive was on an individual basis and, where appropriate, informed by my own experiences with similar issues.

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[51] See: Bruckman (2002).

Ultimately, the guiding principle in methodological and ethical decision-making is to "uphold a standard of protecting participants from harm" (Lotz and Ross 2004; 504), to respect participants' privacy (Dias 2003, 33), and I remained mindful throughout the process to undertake research in an ethically responsible manner.

In terms of citation, there is "a conflict between referencing and anonymity" (UEA ethics approval 13/01/15);[52] as Busse and Hellekson (2012) note, "Negotiating expectations of privacy in the context of cultural production with academic demands of citeability is a central ethical concern" (42). Since referencing with a hyperlink or URL would compromise anonymity (Busse and Hellekson 2012) these are not provided in citation of any fan quotes. Where possible,[53] the date of posting is provided for quotations, thus offering a "level of academic accountability" (Williams 2011a, 169) in the same way as naming the fan sites.

Angela Thomas (2007) argues that in an online context, "to write is to exist, and that writing is an essential component of performing identity" (113). This may be especially so in the case of "linguistic variations of cybertalk" (114). Although largely unconcerned with questions of identity, Susan Herring (1996a) argues for the importance of using direct quotation in linguistic analysis of computer-mediated communication (CMC). In Chapter Four, I analyse the linguistic performance of a fangirl identity, and thus in this context, the language used by fans is of crucial importance. To retain the original nature of comments and given my interest in fangirl performances, fan quotes have not been corrected for spelling or grammar. Moreover, fans often alter spellings and manipulate grammar conventions for emotional expression, and thus presenting quotes accurately throughout the thesis is crucial in order to convey affect and showcase fangirl performances for the reader. Unconventional spellings and grammar will however be indicated '[*sic*]', not with the intent to judge, disparage, or indicate superiority, but so that these are not recognised as an error in transcription.

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[52] See: White (2002).
[53] For Chapter Two and Four, the full date of posting will be cited. In Chapter Three, no exact date was listed on Blogspot posts, instead only dating posts in terms of how long ago they were posted, i.e. "52 weeks ago". In this case, just the year is cited.

Age and Gender

Ethical approval from UEA (2013) was awarded based on my initial expectations of fans being 12-17, however the known majority were older than this age bracket. Despite enjoying the show myself, I had wrongfully expected that fans would be closer to the target 'tween' age demographic. Within the data collected for LJ and Tumblr, age could often be estimated based on, for example, declarations regarding college/university, school year, time in fandom, and mentions of childhood memories in relation to other media texts. For some, exact age was stated on individual (unlocked) blogs/journals, however it was not possible to verify when information was posted, and as it is possible that it had not been updated for some time (i.e. some information did not change over the course of the research process), some individuals could have been older than stated. From ages ascertained, it is expected that all participants would be approaching or are already over eighteen by the submission date of this thesis.[54] Demographic details were much more difficult to access on Blogspot. While some usernames linked to other social media accounts, not all of these contained information either. It is expected that the range of ages were much broader in this space, considering declarations posted on an entry entitled "Over 14? Love *iCarly* and *Victorious*? NO, you are NOT Weird!" (2009).[55] Nevertheless, if any participants were as young as thirteen at the time of posting in 2010 (thirteen being the minimum age for joining most social media platforms), they would also be eighteen or approaching, by the submission date of this thesis.

It is worth stating here, that when I refer to 'youth', or to fans as 'young', I intend this to include those in the university/college age demographic (18-25). Although I am aware that this is a relatively arbitrary designation, as part of "broader processes of juvenescence" (Harris 2005, 213), and in the context of girl and girlhood as unstable, elastic, extended terms (Aapola et al. 2005; Kearney 2011; Negra 2009), it does not seem a stretch to include early adulthood as youth.[56] In the event that fans stated they were older than this age category, they were not discounted from the study.

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[54] See: Scodari (2005).
[55] Fan comments are no longer visible, but the blog post is still accessible at: http://danwarp.blogspot.co.uk/2009/09/over-14-and-love-icarly-no-you-are-not.html. [Accessed 4/9/13].
[56] Particularly in light of ABC Family's recent ambitious attempt to coin a new demographic, the 'Becomers', a catch-all term for women aged 12-34, marking a broader passage from adolescence to adulthood (see: Crupi 2015).

iCarly fans were almost exclusively assumed to be female by their fellow fans (such that great surprise was expressed when members declared themselves to be male), and the vast majority discussed in this thesis appeared to either present as female (ascertained via pictures, pronouns, names, and other indicators), or identified themselves as such. Nevertheless, I did not speak directly to any of these fans and do not presume to know what gender they identify as. Therefore, throughout the following chapters I use only gender-neutral pronouns to avoid misgendering any of the fans. Moreover, fans that identify as male (I'm aware of at least 3) are equally included in the study, for as discussed earlier in Chapter One, while the term 'fangirl' reflects the predominant (perceived) age bracket and gender of fans, I use it in a non-essentialist manner.

Chapter Two:

Negotiating a Fangirl Identity: Producers in a Fan Space, Fangirl Hierarchies, and Inter-/Intra-Fandom

Derek Johnson (2007a) notes that "Disharmony has long held a contradictory place in studies of fandom" (285), with early scholars such as Henry Jenkins (1992) and Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) emphasising unity and cohesion in fan communities. Fan studies has since paid greater attention to internal hierarchies, (Baym 2000; Dell 1998; Harris 1998; MacDonald 1998) and notions of fan capital and distinction (Chin 2010; Hills 2002), yet work specifically on inter-fandom (Busse 2013; Hills 2012; Williams 2013) and intra-fandom (Stanfill 2013) dynamics and distinctions has only more recently begun to emerge. Since fandom moved online and the range of social networking sites fans occupy continues to increase, fandom has grown only more fragmented with fans finding their homes in a variety of spaces, from Tumblr to Twitter, Instagram to Pinterest. In this context, I consider it crucial to begin exploring how fans of the same object perform similarly and differently according to the various spaces they occupy, and in turn, how fans monitor, shame, or 'imagine' those in different spaces. Fan scholars are more than aware of the ways in which fans are shamed by those outside the community, with fangirls amongst those most frequently targeted. However, I am concerned here with exploring shaming and policing between *iCarly* fans, and in particular, the ways in which 'fangirl' as a stereotype, a label, and as pathology is negotiated within, and comes to structure, inter-/intra-fandom dynamics and distinctions.

In this chapter I focus on an *iCarly* LiveJournal (LJ) community, the Groovy Smoothie (GS), exploring the ways in which GS fans discordantly negotiate and repurpose fangirl stereotypes, align themselves with and distance themselves from the label 'fangirl', and defend and legitimise their fangirl culture and performance. As a relatively small, close-knit community in its early days, 'fangirling' was expressly welcomed, predicated on an assumed communal understanding to what claiming the term for themselves, and labelling their performance as such, indicated within this space. As a central pleasure for GS fans, fangirling then became a potential source of fan shame, or at least a riskier pleasure, when the show's creator-producer, Dan

Schneider, later joined the community. The producers' presence instigated a variety of inter- and intra-fandom distinctions that coalesced around the figure of the fangirl and its dual-definition (see Introduction), while the hundreds of new fans that followed him to the GS fuelled them even further. While inter-fandom usually refers to disparate fan groups, here I consider an inter-fandom dynamic in terms of *iCarly* fans in different spaces, and intra-fandom between original members and 'newbie' GS fans.

The GS was created specifically as a space to discuss the adult-natured elements of the show that fans perceived, as well as to explore these in the fan works they shared. While *iCarly* fandom was concurrently present on Tumblr, Twitter, and a number of other corporate and fan-created message boards elsewhere on the internet, LJ was considered the primary meeting place for older *iCarly* fans between 2008-2010. Of the visible fans online, the GS fan community is significant in making clear that tween fandoms are not exclusively, nor even predominantly tween. While the idea of programmes appealing outside their conventional/assumed demographics is not necessarily unusual (Ross and Stein 2008) (i.e. adults watch children's programmes and children watch adult programmes), this chapter contradicts the common perception that tween fandom would have (only) tween-age fans. GS fans were keenly aware they were above the age of the target audience, which was a source of ironic self-deprecation as much as it was a form of distinction. Their generational subjectivities and lived experiences tended to inform their meaning-making practices and shaped their relations to the text, and their age was sometimes considered a key element in their pleasures of being in tweendom.

After having mapped out the form and function of LiveJournal and the GS community more specifically, this chapter is divided into four primary sections. In the first section I consider the key pleasures that GS fans identified in watching and 'being fannish' about a tween sitcom, the performative nature of "collaborative interpretation" (Baym 2000, 83), and the particular reading and interpretive strategies that were central to the identity of the community and fangirl performances in this space. Pre-Schneider's arrival, 'fangirl' was used to designate a performance of fannishness, investment, and affect, specifically tied to fans' performative readings of the text. In this context, I argue claiming 'fangirl' for the self functioned to demonstrate one's belonging, value, or status in the community.

Focusing on posts made around the time of Schneider's arrival, in the second section of the chapter I consider fangirls' propensity for shame, how shame itself is gendered (Bartky 1990), and the mechanics of its internalisation. Amidst abstract speculation that Schneider was lurking, fans seemed hopeful that their fangirl identities were approved and accepted by the producer but, faced with the real possibility of meeting him online, such optimism was swiftly overturned as fans sought to hide under the threat of judgement. Analysing fans' responses to his arrival demonstrates that earlier uses and meanings of 'fangirl' shifted in the presence of the producer. In this context, fangirl stereotypes and notions of 'fangirl as pathology' were drawn on/aligned with as part of self-shaming defence strategies to protect from outside judgement.

In the third section of the chapter, I turn my attention to inter-fandom distinctions, illustrating some of the contradictory and disparate ways in which original GS fans (re)aligned themselves with 'fangirl' in the playful sense of the term as a bid to elevate or distinguish their *iCarly* community from those outside LiveJournal. With Schneider as a catalyst in a further example, I then examine how 'newbie' GS fans sought to distance themselves from Twitter fans, invoking derogatory fangirl stereotypes and using pathologising language to discredit and exclude. In this context I then begin to trace the emergence of intra-fandom distinctions between GS fans.

In the final section of this chapter I consider the implications of a producer entering a 'transformational' (obsession_inc 2009) fandom space in the context of the community's fragmentation and collapse. I propose that the producer's presence may be best understood as/like an 'authorised fannish text' (Scott 2007a). Whether a covert measure through which to control and influence fandom, or an unintended consequence, Schneider's presence constrained fangirl modes of creativity and suppressed the communal practices that were central to GS fans' pleasures in the text and the community. At the same time, divisions between established members and the 'newbies' or "interloping fans" (Williams 2013) that followed Schneider began to emerge. In this context I examine the nature of intra-fandom distinctions, in particular those based on gender, age, and authenticity, and thus calling forth once more the figure of the fangirl.

This case study is significant in revealing a complex set of negotiations involved in performing a fangirl identity and suggesting that the dual-definition of 'fangirl' does not always easily map onto positive/self, negative/other. It also serves to elucidate the ways in which fangirl stereotypes become implicated in tensions and conflicts between fans, and in their defence and legitimisation strategies. While it contributes to an emerging body of work concerned with inter-fandom and intra-fandom, it also contributes to work that has begun to examine some of the particular (gendered) implications for fangirls/fangirl modes within the context of fandom's 'mainstreaming'/increased visibility (Scott 2011), and the blurring boundaries between fans and producers.

Fan Culture on LiveJournal

LJ is a blogging platform integrated with social networking capabilities. The community-based social network was founded in 1999 and is now considered the internet's "oldest living social network" (Orsini 2012). After LJ enabled users to create communities in 2000, fans began migrating to the blogging site from mailing lists and newsgroups that had previously been the central hubs for fannish activity and communication. Within these communities, LJ offers a threaded commenting system; a structure that enables at-length discussions that often come to resemble "collective thinking spaces" (Busse 2007d, n.p). Rather than compiling comments in chronological order, LJ allows users to respond to specific comments, thus creating threads that branch off from the main post topic. These threads are collapsed and indented and users can be notified when someone responds directly to their comment. This structure is therefore conducive to community-building (Bley 2009); individual voices are retained, and different angles of the conversation are distinguished but not wholly separate, and therefore able to feedback into the main focus of the thread. For Busse and Hellekson (2006), the advent of LJ was "an important force in fandom and in the construction of fandom communities" (12), with fannish communication centralised in one primary location.

While "the idea that L J [*sic*] is dominated by women is empirically hard to support" (Driscoll 2008b, 99), scholars tend to consider LJ to be a particularly female space (boyd 2005; Busse 2006; Driscoll 2008b). danah boyd (2005), for example,

characterises the social network as "younger, more female and more resistant to the dominant culture" (n.p). Moreover, it is not only researchers that hold such assumptions, but also fan communities/LJ users imagine LJ to be dominated by women (Driscoll 2008b). Equally, in the GS, given the surprise expressed when a fan revealed themselves to be male, it appears it was assumed that most, if not all, members were female.

LJ was a central fan hub until 2007 when relations between the userbase and LJ began to break down and fandom began to fragment and migrate to different spaces, such as Dreamwidth (an online journal space created by ex-LiveJournal staff in 2008) and ArchiveOfOurOwn (an archive for fan fiction launched in 2009). Both fan-run sites, they were created at least in part as a response to various issues with LJ, as well as the corporate attempts of (now defunct) Fanlib to monetise/commercialise fanfiction.[57] Moving forward, LJ remained an important fannish space, albeit alongside others, until 2011-2012. Although still used today, LJ is no longer a primary fan location, displaced by newer social media platforms, particularly Tumblr.

The Groovy Smoothie (GS) opened in May 2008, thus *after* fans had already begun to leave the site in large numbers. While topic threads continued to be posted to the GS until November 2011 when *iCarly* ended, fan activity slowed down significantly in late 2009[58] and decreased dramatically from the beginning of 2010 (see Figure 1.1). As this chapter illustrates, there were a number of factors that contributed to the breakdown of this community: Schneider's involvement and the mass influx of new fans that followed him gave rise to inter-fandom distinctions, the increasing frequency of fandom 'wank', and escalating tensions between ship factions (coinciding with Schneider's ship-teasing efforts both online and in canon).[59] Aside from these particular factors, it is also significant that the steep decline in activity coincided with fandom's migration to Tumblr. The position of the GS within this context is of particular note as it traversed a particular moment in fan culture whereby fandom was growing in visibility and fans were beginning to move to new social networks.

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[57] See: Jenkins (2007b).

[58] In October 2009, **GS1** (24/10/09) posted to the GS requesting recommendations for an "active" *iCarly* forum because the GS had gotten "a little slow".

[59] *iCarly* itself also declined somewhat in popularity. When Schneider turned his attention to *Victorious,* which premiered March 2010, *iCarly* was subject to an inconsistent broadcast schedule, with episodes airing infrequently without long-planned air dates, and GS fans also claimed the quality of *iCarly* episodes declined significantly.

Schneider's arrival in the GS can be located within the context and seen reflective of the 'mainstreaming' of fan culture and the shifting relations between fans/audiences and producers. Likewise, the influx of new fans to LJ, although a result of Schneider's publicisation of the GS on Twitter, is reflective of the heightened visibility of fandom via social networking sites and the shifting nature of fandom in the context of social media. As this chapter illustrates, increased access to, and visibility of, fandom, had particular implications for fangirls and fangirl modes of fandom. That is, Schneider's presence in, and exposure of, the GS intensified inter-/intra-fandom shaming and policing and constrained fangirl activities that were central to GS fans' pleasures.

Mapping Out the Groovy Smoothie

The Groovy Smoothie (GS) was created (and moderated) by **GS2** and **GS3** (**GS4** later joined as a moderator) shortly before the end of *iCarly's* first season. The profile page describes the GS as an "anything goes community" for older fans to discuss the show, post fanfiction, graphics, screencaps, and more. Specifically, the GS was "dedicated to finding and discussing, in detail, everything about *iCarly* that makes it inappropriate" (**GS5**, 23/2/09). According to the two 'super!mods', such a space did not exist anywhere else at the time, and thus they claimed the GS to be the first of its kind. Adult-rated fic, including those with "crazy" ship pairings could be shared as long as they included appropriate warnings and explicit content was 'flocked' (friends locked). All ship combinations were welcome, including slash, het, and age difference, and ship shaming or fighting was completely banned. This was a fan space for adult discussion, intended to be peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive (**GS6**, 11/5/09). During its first year, the GS was a small, relatively cohesive fandom space. Many of the original members, including the moderators, were already friends/acquainted with one another from *Drake & Josh* fandom (Schneider's previous sitcom). When Schneider later joined the GS and tweeted his involvement, membership leapt from around 100 to 500+ members within weeks. As of July 2013, after the community had become inactive, it had 916 members listed. This number has since decreased further during the research process (October 2014) and it is likely the case that there were more than 900 members while *iCarly* was at its peak.

Taking its name directly from *iCarly*, the GS metaphorically lives in the *iCarly*-verse as the Groovy Smoothie is also the name of the local smoothie bar that the iCarlies frequent in the series. Naming the community after this highlights the sense of a shared space with that of the characters in the fictional world. Having said that, although mentioned in the first season, the Groovy Smoothie did not appear on screen until the second season. Therefore, the space of the Groovy Smoothie initially existed in fans' collective imagination as a fantasy space that they could claim as their own outside of the show's narrative. The act of drinking a smoothie was frequently used by the moderators when opening up new episode discussion posts as a concept to metaphorically unite members by encouraging them to "play nice. Don't be lame. Have fun. Drink a smoothie. Talk about *iCarly*". (**GS3**, 13/6/09). In this way, they were metaphorically writing the Groovy Smoothie into existence and welcoming fans into the establishment.

The GS home page background is a light blue with a slightly darker blue header. The main image is comprised of four separate (non-official) pictures of the four main characters (Figure 2.1). Within the header are four main links; Recent Entries, Archive, Friends and Profile.
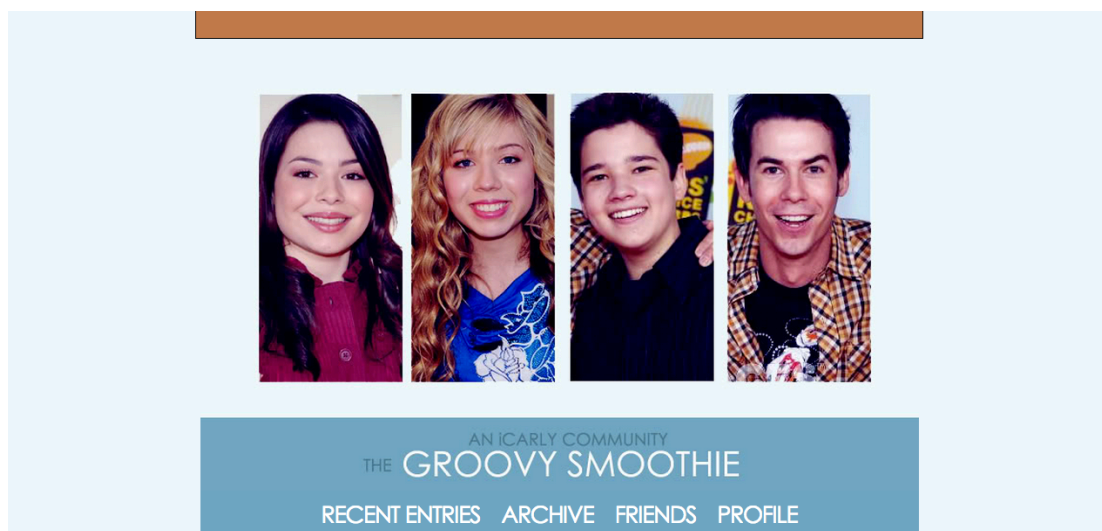
Figure 2.1: Groovy Smoothie header.

The sidebar houses the links list (Figure 2.2), six of which are affiliated LJ communities, one to the official Nickelodeon *iCarly* website, and one to Turbo Nick—an online broadband channel that fans (in the USA only) can use to catch up with the

show. Below this is the tags list (Figure 2.3) which enables users to navigate the site and find specific content according to topic or theme. There are tags for each of the main actors, characters, episodes, and possible ship combinations. There are also tags for Twitter accounts and YouTube channels associated with *iCarly,* merchandise, interviews, and iCarly.com's web content.

Figure 2.2: GS sidebar and links list.

Figure 2.3: GS tags list.

There are many fanfiction related tags and each author or icon-maker in the community that submits work is given a dedicated tag. Fan producers are thus equally

privileged with links as the characters and actors, underlining the importance of fan creations/producers to this community. Before exploring the origins of the community's practices, it is first important to place these within the context of a fan space that explicitly welcomed fangirls as this invitation can be seen to shape fan performances**.**

Fangirls Allowed

The welcome page of the GS (22/5/09) states that "even" fangirling would be accepted in the community, particularly around Jerry Trainor (Spencer). In this context, 'fangirling' appears to refer specifically to 'fangirl' as a subject position that is offered to female fans who articulate desire for a male celebrity (Bury 2005). This was evidently received as a welcome invitation, as one of the first members exclaimed: "I am currently squeeing in a very fangirl-y way (well, I'm virtually squeeing. I only literally squee out loud on special occasions). I am so up for some *iCarly* discussing and fangirling. :D" (**GS7**, 22/5/08). It is clear that the explicit acceptance of fangirling in the GS was of particular importance, and immediately 'squeeing' at the news, **GS7** was quick to take up this invitation by laying claim to their own fangirl performance, and aligning themselves with a (gendered) performance of fannish affect. **GS2** (23/5/08) also expressed how it was especially enjoyable to be "accepted AND a crazy fangirl". That "feeling accepted" combined with being a "crazy fangirl" was highlighted as especially important suggests that "crazy fangirling" and being, or feeling, accepted whilst performing in this way are usually mutually exclusive.

The fact that the community explicitly outlined that fangirling was acceptable also suggests that fangirling is not automatically perceived as an appropriate form of behaviour; that it literally demands an overt invitation or else it is assumed to be unwelcome or even frowned upon. This is likely for a number of reasons; not only are fangirls keenly aware of the devalued status of their fandom within society (Nash and Lahti 1999), but as a number of fan scholars have noted, within fan culture itself female fans are frequently dismissed for engaging in fangirl behaviours, or more specifically, expressing their attraction to male characters/actors.[60] Within this context,

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[60] See: Busse (2013); Jancovich & Hunt (2004); MacDonald (1998); Williams (2011a; 2011b); Zubernis and Larsen (2012).

Bury (2005) suggests referring to someone as a fangirl can be considered a way to discipline female desire and police appropriate fan behaviour. However, the way in which fangirling was invited at the GS (with the qualifying reference to Spencer) could be seen as a reversal of the logic Bury describes, that is, it functioned as a welcoming of fangirls' expressions of desire or attraction for an actor or character *and* a reinscription of this as an acceptable fan performance. Such expressions are evident in community discourse, and thus the invitation and the implied assurance that they were acceptable may have functioned to permit them.

The context in which the label was also often referred to or invoked were in picspams or discussions that fans themselves considered to be the most outlandish or "cracked out". In this way, tongue firmly in cheek, fans appeared to be acknowledging the humour in their shared interpretations and fan creations, playfully warning each other as to the farcicalness of their readings, and encouraging the group to be as creatively absurd as they could be. Used in this way, the term did not refer to expressions of desire or attraction to a (male) celebrity. In fact, overall, this was not a dominant preoccupation at the GS and thus the welcoming of fangirling was more readily accepted as permission to squee over a variety of things; ships, narrative events, characters and actors (both male and female). Broadly speaking, the explicit welcome communicated that one not need hide their affect, desires, investment, nor maintain any kind of 'rational' (masculine) distance. There were numerous other circumstances—most notably during ruptures in the community—in which the term was employed or invoked which will be discussed in the next section of the chapter.

Underlining its performative nature, being a fangirl or performing as such was considered by some to be particularly rewarding when other people enjoyed reading the fan works that were inspired by, or a product of, their fangirl tendencies. Furthermore, LJ itself was singled out as a particularly good space in facilitating the exchange and enjoyment of fangirl-inspired fan works and in which to unabashedly revel in their communal fangirlishness. There was also a sense in which some older fans appeared to consider their fangirl tendencies a proud symbol of their youth; while they were older, they were pleased to be still able to squeal over their favourite characters, TV shows, and ships without restraint or fear of being considered

immature. Although the GS was intended for an older *iCarly* fan, this did not then mean that fangirling, often associated with younger fans, was unwelcome or frowned upon. Instead, it was considered a healthy expression of fannishness, one that could be freely shared without shame or accusations of being "too girly" or "too young". For some GS fans it appeared to be considered a (performative) identity or ability to be proud of possessing, as a marker of youth not immaturity, regardless of actual age or even in *spite* of actual age.

For the fans who claimed the term for themselves, particularly the original core members in the early days of the community, the display of fangirl modes of engagement was a knowing performance and claiming the term functioned to demonstrate their belonging and valued status in the community via their particular reading and interpretive strategies. Hills (2002) argues that:

> fandom is not simply a thing... [i]t is also always performative... it is an identity which is (dis-)claimed, and which performs cultural work. Claiming the status of a 'fan' may, in certain contexts, provide a cultural space for types of knowledge and attachment (xi).

In the GS, claiming the status of fangirl or referring to their fan works as a product of fangirl tendencies implied a close attachment and indicated an intricate or in-depth knowledge of the source text, as well as particular interpretive skills, in particular, the ability to make meaning from subtext and cross-reference across the Schneiderverse. In this context, claiming the term functioned as a bid for fan(girl) symbolic capital. Thus, in this way, performing the fangirl identity itself was a marker of status and belonging in the community as much as it was a feature of being considered, or presenting oneself as, a 'good' or valued fan. Making meaning from subtext, a defining feature of a fangirl performance (Scott 2011), and acts of 'collaborative interpretation' (Baym 2000) were in fact the foundation on which the GS community was originally built.

So far, I have outlined the nature of the GS, the welcoming of fangirls, and begun to explore some of the ways a fangirl identity was performed (pre-Schneider). To make sense of the community's meaning making practices that were constitutive of fangirl performances, next I turn to an examination of the 'collaborative interpretations' (Baym 2000) upon which the GS was founded. In the early days of the community,

the nature of GS fans' textual interpretations were central to the identity of the community, and the following discussion is significant in illustrating some of the key pleasures of tweendom and more specifically, fans' pleasures in *iCarly*. It will also serve to contextualise fans' defence strategies (in relation to their fangirl identities and reading practices) and responses to Schneider's arrival, thereby highlighting the ways in which the GS shifted as a consequence of the producer's presence.

"A Kid's Show with Handcuffs": 'Collaborative Interpretations' and the Key Pleasures of *iCarly*

In focusing on "collaborative interpretation" (Baym 2000) I do not wish to homogenise fans, overstate unity and community, or the collaborative effort of fandom. As some scholars have noted, this has been a tendency in some feminist accounts of fandom, and it may be to neglect fan social hierarchies (Barker 1993; Barker and Brooks 1998; Chin 2010). Conversely, I examine both aspects of fandom. In the later sections of the chapter, I turn my attention to the increasingly hierarchical nature of the Groovy Smoothie (GS) as it became increasingly fraught amidst inter-/intra-fandom distinctions. However, first I turn my attention to communal acts of interpretation as they are seen to "[offer] the chance to perform for one's fellow fans" (Baym 2000, 83). The concept of performativity is particularly key in this context as the ways in which the text was read and interpreted by GS fans, and the aspects of the text that were selected for prioritisation and transformation, can be seen to constitute a fangirl performance or mode of engagement. More importantly, this performance, that is, performing in accordance with the "communal practices" (Bury 2005) established by the community, can be seen as a bid for fan symbolic capital (Hills 2002) and an expression of belonging or 'individualized collectivity" (Sandvoss 2005, 64).

Paul Booth (2010) argues that fanfiction is "both an appreciation and a reappreciation of the object of fandom. Appreciation involves reading for meaning, but reappreciation is reading the media object again though the lens of the community" (104). I suggest that for original members, the GS functioned in the same way as Booth describes of fanfiction; being a member of the community shaped individual fans' readings and interpretations and shifted their relations to the text, such that one was reappreciating the text through the lens of the community, both alone in

(re-)watching and together in the episode discussion threads.

Origins of Community Practices and Subtext in Tweendom

Jenkins (1992) suggests that a collective meaning of a text relies on fans sharing "a certain common ground, a set of shared assumptions, interpretations and rhetorical strategies, inferential moves, semantic fields and metaphors [These are…] preconditions for meaningful debate over specific interpretations" (89). The common ground, or the 'right way' of reading a text, as Jenkins refers to it, is clearly established within the community guidelines on the GS' profile page and then further substantiated by fans' reading practices themselves. Highlighting the distinction between the tween targeted show and the adult natured fandom, the community's description refers to *iCarly* as a "kid's show with handcuffs".[61] This statement indicates to newcomers the adult nature and tone of the community discourse. It is also particularly appropriate given the origins of the community, which I will now illustrate.

The creation of the community was initially prompted by discussions between several prominent GS members in **GS3**'s journal (7/4/08; 14/5/08) about Spencer's possible porn career. Links to these (unlocked journal entries) were provided at the GS, therefore suggesting that the moderators wished to offer new members the opportunity to see the community's reading practices 'in action'. The Pornstar!Spencer theory was inspired by the episode 'iStakeout' (1.20) in which the local police department use Carly and Spencer's loft apartment to watch a suspected criminal across the street who is thought to be selling pirated DVDs. After the cops intrude on an iCarly webshow broadcast, the *iCarly* trio take it upon themselves to try and obtain the necessary evidence for a conviction. After attempting to buy "cheap entertainment", they discover that the shop owner is instead selling homemade films about pirates. One of the DVDs is entitled 'Shiver me Booty', and for the founding members, this sounded reminiscent of a porn movie title, and 'cheap entertainment' a coded reference to pornography. One of the cops 'staked out' at the Shay loft is a bully that Spencer knew from summer camp as a teenager called Spanky. Later in the episode, the cop repeatedly spanks Spencer with various objects including a cucumber and a toilet seat.

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[61] This statement is a reference to a comment originally made by **GS4** (23/2/09) when welcoming a new fan to "this den of iniquity".

Upon hearing Spencer's line, "Can you please not spank me with my own cucumber", **GS8** (9/4/08) stated: "That is dirtier than most things I hear on *Queer as Folk*. Holy shit. That is the slashiest thing I've ever heard of". By comparing *iCarly* to *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005), an often explicit Showtime series focused on the lives of gay men and women, **GS8** effectively substantiates and legitimises their slash or queer interpretation of the text, whilst also highlighting just how suggestively homoerotic the dialogue was. Indeed, **GS9** (9/4/08) shared in, and confirmed this reading as they agreed: "I also kept thinking of them as a pairing because well ... the thought of a teenage guy constantly slapping another guy's butt in summer camp is kinky."

In the GS, comparisons were often made between *iCarly* and other media texts, thus highlighting distinctions and (surprising) similarities between tweendom and adult-oriented media. It is arguable that in some ways, the attempts by young adult fans to compare and distinguish *iCarly* from other shows was a way to legitimise their enjoyment of a show that would usually be considered too young for them. However, this strategy often highlighted the extent to which *iCarly* lent itself to adult readings, as well as to subtextual interpretation and thus to fangirl performances. To return to 'iStakeout', at the end of the episode, Spencer handcuffs the cop to the sofa and gets his revenge by spanking him with a broom, and thus the community's motto and approach to reading *iCarly* as a "kid's show with handcuffs" was born; a reference directly derived from canon and the ensuing discussion between a small group of fans. Both the episode and fan discussion inspired the beginnings of the community, and together they set the tone and came to shape the nature of the GS's readings of future episodes.

Clearly, fan discussions in the GS were "adult in nature" (**GS2**, 22/5/08), often including sexual and/or 'kinky' content, but these were usually based on what fans considered to be not-so-subtle innuendos made *within* the show. On occasions, however, there were fans that expressed discomfort, questioning whether they were "just paranoid and above the intended demographic" (**GS10**, 8/7/08), perhaps reading too much into the characters' dialogue. While for others, the depth of their investment in *iCarly* was uneasy due to the implied age discrepancy and an underlying sense that they should *not* be so invested in 'just' a tween show: "I got to remember this is a Y7-

G rated show. I should not be looking this in depth at it but I can't help it….I feel sort of weird getting this worked up over a show on Nick" (**GS11**, 15/7/09).

For the most part, however, GS fans revelled in sharing their observations of this content: "Our minds? They're having a party down there in the gutter" (**GS2**, 8/7/08). Some were able to reconcile their fandom based precisely on their age and experience, considering it to be a benefit of being older: "only us adults will analyze this oh-so deeply. kids [*sic*] may not put that much thought into it, but hey... it's made by adults! we [*sic*] can create our theories" (**GS12**, 25/3/09), while others claimed it was *more* than a tween show and it appealed to them because: "it's not, like, stupid basic tween humor, it's actually quite adult and it's full of stuff like innuendo and pop culture references and parodies" (**GS13**, 29/9/10). Although both discourses may point to fans' underlying anxiety with being in tweendom, in either case, they positioned themselves as a (more) sophisticated audience (e.g. looking at the show 'in depth' or creating 'theories'), and legitimised both their fandom and the fannish object via their reading and interpretive practices and fan activities.

Many were also quite clear in their discussions that they felt their adult readings were directly encouraged by the text, rather than existing only in wilful interpretations: "I do not feel to blame… it's not our fault Dan Schneider is sending our minds straight to the gutter" (**GS3**, 8/7/08). Later in the chapter I will illustrate how this stance was drastically overturned once Schneider came to join the community, but prior to his involvement fans were adamant that "the undertones, the kink, the crack, [was] all already there. We just pull it out and play with it" (**GS3**, 28/9/08). Fans in the GS considered there to be a large older audience and clearly found plenty in the tween sitcom to be fannish about, whether adapting and transforming it to their own desires, or identifying in the text thematic content or references that they considered to be covertly addressed to their sensibilities.

GS4 (28/9/08) even went so far as to state that, "At this point, I'm almost more surprised when Dan Schneider *doesn't* go somewhere inappropriate with a joke than when he does" (my emphasis). Therefore, not only was innuendo entirely expected, but it was also missed when fans anticipated a risqué joke and Schneider failed to deliver. Crucially, it also enabled them to distance themselves, or alleviate themselves,

from accusations of being a particular kind of fan: "All the kinky and homoerotic undertones in the Schneiderverse are just FTW ['for the win']. Seriously... we're not just sad fangirls. It's THERE" (**GS4**, 28/9/08). If such jokes were embedded in the text, GS fans could potentially escape accusations of being "sad fangirls" that have nothing else to do but read 'too much' or 'too sexually' into the text

Fans also discussed at length their belief that such content was in fact intended for *them* as an older audience, that *iCarly* intentionally flirted with a transgenerational audience.[62] At the same time, they often expressed surprise at how such content ever managed to escape the censors, often praising Schneider in his efforts to break boundaries. During a discussion about demographics and feeling comfortable in a fandom centred around a text aimed at a much younger audience, **GS14** (10/4/11) explained that they believed the number of innuendos were "Schneider's way of both pushing the envelope AND making it enjoyable for adults". In a similar way, **GS3** (7/4/08) stated:

> I'm pretty sure Dan Schneider and Company know exactly who the 'other' demographic for these shows is, and they're not just winking at us, they're waving their arms and going, 'look! look! this is for you!'… I feel acknowledged and somewhat catered to. It's kind of nice.

During this exchange, **GS3** suggested that with certain content, such as Jerry Trainor (Spencer) being "shirtless/pantless/naked/wet a lot", it was no longer a subtle wink at the older audience members, but catering very deliberately to their tastes "because come on, they don't put that in for the 9-year-olds." With this standpoint, they were able to absolve themselves from accusations that they may be unfairly 'ageing up' the text and could legitimise their pleasures in and readings of *iCarly*. Furthermore, it also allowed them to envisage themselves as acknowledged and valued audience members by the producer, and hence *not* deviant, as **GS15** (4/12/07) stated: 'I'm not sure he ISN'T writing for an older audience and just disguising it as a kids show". That *iCarly* was aimed at an audience older than it may claim, was quite clearly a collective understanding held by many members of the GS who together enjoyed the parties they had "down there in the gutter". In what follows I consider the influential nature of communal reading practices in terms of how they alter fans' relations to, and deepen

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[62] In relation to Nickelodeon specifically, see: Banet-Weiser (2007); Hendershot (2004); Kinder (1995).

their pleasures in, the text. I then turn to a discussion of tweendom and the ways in which its interconnected sense of community was based, not only on shared textual interpretations, but also on shared identities as older (than the target demographic) fans.

Communal Reading Practices and Interconnected Community in Tweendom

For Bury (2005), "what gives a community its substance is the consistent repetition of… 'various acts' by a majority of members, acts that [Bury] refer[s] to as communal practices" (14). Reading subtext and identifying sexual references were primary communal practices in the GS, established via repetition by a majority of members (in its early days), and which came to define the community's existence and identity. Once established as the community's approach to reading, interpreting, and enjoying the text, the community itself held a central role in guiding and teaching its members how to interpret the text in this particular favoured way. **GS16**'s (9/11/08) comment highlights the influence and importance of the community to their understanding and enjoyment of the show:

> You people have ruined this show for me! Like I use to notice little innuendo here and there but now it's so blatent [*sic*] to me that all I think is "I wonder what groovysmoothie's [*sic*] going to say about that"!! I wouldn't have it any other way :D

Culled from a message board thread and displayed on the profile page as a mark of honour, this comment was clearly important to the moderators of the community: "That comment makes me really, really happy (**GS3**, 10/11/08), perhaps indicating to them the success of the community in establishing a collective understanding and communal reading of the show. Crucially, it was also one distinctly in keeping with the original ethos behind its creation. **GS16**'s comment points to the extent to which the GS' discussions of *iCarly* had radically altered or "ruined" the show for them; that they could no longer read the text any other way than through its innuendo/subtext. It also underlines the importance of the community for sharing and validating fan readings, since in the instance of identifying innuendos their first thought was to wonder whether other fans had noticed and what they might be saying about them.

Although GS fans did not necessarily watch the show together, in a physical or literal sense (although they often did virtually by live commenting in episode discussion threads), **GS16**'s comment highlights that "communal rather than individualistic modes of reception" (Duffett 2013, 239) can still be practiced, alone, in a symbolic sense and the media object read or 'reappreciated' "through the lens of the community" (Booth 2010, 104). In this way, the enjoyment of *iCarly,* and the enjoyment of being a part of the GS, can be seen as deeply interrelated. Once schooled in the community's practices of reading, and what aspects of the text to select for "communal and discursive prioritisation" (Hills 2015, 153), the fan can perform these readings alone; their participation in fandom having influenced their own readings. They are then encouraged to return to the community space to share their interpretations/observations, to discover those of other fans, and to take further pleasure in discussing them together (Baym 2000). This sharing is of course performative and demonstrates to fellow members one's value to and status within the community, and hence is one way of gaining fangirl capital.

While Booth (2010) argues that digital fandom "relies on a certain level of community and socialisation" (104), meaning-production itself is conceived as a social and public process (Jenkins 1992). Viewing texts in groups are seen by fans to "multiply their pleasures" (Duffett 2013, 250); "turn[ing] its reception into a celebratory social event and in that sense to experientially affirm that it matters" (ibid). Although unpicking subtext can be practiced alone, it is more pleasurable to share these readings with other fans, hence likely one reason why, as Busse (2007a) argues, community is so central to fangirl modes (see Chapter One). In the GS, fans' pleasures can be mapped across those derived from participating in a community, those found in the text itself, the possibilities for fan engagement it was seen to offer to them, and the interrelation of these elements in a self-reinforcing manner.

Some GS fans identified that the sense of, and pleasure in, community was particularly heightened in tweendom due to the nature of the text and their (older) age. In an unlocked journal entry hosted by **GS4** (12/1/10), a group of prominent original GS members discussed the ways in which they experienced tweendom as having an "interconnected sense of community" (**GS4**, 12/1/10), in part based on their recognition of particular reading practices that were common across a range of tween

fandoms on LJ.[63] That is, within LJ tweendom similar tropes were followed in terms of dominant ships, usually slash and/or ships that are extremely unlikely to become canon on a tween show (significant age difference or incest). This was also the case in the GS, at least in the early days pre-Schneider, before the community was popularised and became Seddie (Sam/Freddie) dominant.

In trying to pinpoint what the common link was across tweendom, **GS4** proposed that what tied fans particularly close together was their age:

> [It] is the sense of being outside of the target demographic for the show and being able to look in on that world and see things that we wouldn't have seen as preteens and that the target demographic doesn't necessarily see. It's not to say that we're coming in with our more adult perspectives and we're reading things into the shows – more like now we're looking at it from the perspective of the adults who can get the jokes that fly over the kids' (Ibid).

It was their age as fans outside the demographic that not only "tied them together" as fans in a community, but which informed their readings and interpretations, and shaped or influenced the ways they made meaning. **GS4** proposed that they were reading the text from a more mature vantage point and that there was pleasure in being able to see or understand things in the text that they would not have done several years earlier. Their collaborative interpretations of the text were also directly informed and constituted by their gendered/generational subjectivities, and individual and shared lived experiences; their demands, desires, and knowledge of the world *reoriented* canon (Willis 2006, 153). For this group of GS fans, it was not only their ability to understand the more mature jokes that made *iCarly* enjoyable, but their maturity was also considered to offer them particular insight into the characters and their "interior realities" (Jones 2002, 86). One of the ways in which these fans most closely related to the text, and the characters, was linked to the fact that they had lived through their tween years and felt they could understand, in retrospect, what *more* may be going on in the lives of these tween characters than a tween sitcom could represent.

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[63] In this discussion, interconnected tweendom was considered to be exclusively LJ fandoms attached to tween TV with fans above the target demographic.

The Storytelling Politics of Tween TV and Being Older in Tweendom

iCarly is a TV-G rated show which stipulates that "it contains little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations".[64] For some members of the GS, *iCarly* fandom (and tweendom more broadly) was seen as a unique and expansive 'playground' for fannish activity by virtue of the very limitations imposed on the tween-oriented text, and the spaces of possibility that content restrictions left open for them to explore. Playing with the text and filling in canonical spaces is of course not unique to tweendom, rather it is a central aspect of what 'transformational' (obsession_inc 2009) fandom *is*: "Canon restrictions are used as both creative impetus and delineation" (Stein 2006, 248), offering an opportunity to write stories that would otherwise not be told on screen (Jenkins 2006b[1995]; Stein 2008). However, for fans taking part in the discussion on **GS4**'s journal, tween texts were perceived to offer extended "narrative territory" (Scott 2007b) since the show could not contravene particular "social mores and conventions and restrictions" (**GS4**, 12/1/10):

> there (sadly) aren't going to be openly gay characters in openly gay relationships on Disney and Nickelodeon anytime in the near future. There aren't going to be canon couples with noticeable age differences. There aren't going to be characters breaking drastically outside of their traditional gender and societal roles (ibid).

While there was tentative disappointment about some of these restrictions, these fans appeared to be largely accepting of the ideologies that shaped *iCarly* as a tween show, that is, providing they could (in fandom) play outside the lines of tween TV and explore in-depth the places that "tweendom can't go" (**GS4**, 30/8/10).

Jenkins (2006b[1995]) argues that, "fandom is characterised by a contradictory and often highly fluid series of attitudes toward the primary text, marked by fascination as well as frustration, proximity as well as distance, acceptance of program ideology as well as rejection" (111). The perception of greater silences and conservative ideologies in tween TV was rarely a source of frustration, but rather fascination, and the sense of increased possibilities wrought by the genre was one of their greatest pleasures in tween texts and tweendom: "It's more than just the fact we acknowledge that a lot of the stuff we love can't be canon – to a degree, I think that's the point, you

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[64] The TV Parental Guidelines. n.d. "Understanding the TV Ratings". http://www.tvguidelines.org/ratings.htm. [Accessed 3/9/14].

know?" (**GS4**, 12/1/10). In tweendom, fans did not have to live within the confines of the genre, but could fill the silences the text left open with their own voices, often in ways informed by their own experiences growing up. For example, restrictions placed on the tween show, in terms of its thematic content, prohibited canon from fully exploring elements of teenage life as it was understood and/or was experienced by older fans (e.g. non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities). Moreover, as a comedy, *iCarly* either avoids angst entirely, or makes light of it, but in tweendom fans could explore the darker sides of the characters and their worlds:

> We get to take Disney perfect teens with their simple and conveniently comedic "common teen problems" and add a depth to them, give them thoughts/situations that couldn't possibly be explored in canon. We can turn them into teens that can hurt, and hurt *bad*, that can break, that can explore their sexuality, that can curse, that can make mistakes that are more serious than any mishap/shenanigan that may have occurred in canon (**GS17**, 13/1/10).

Rather than 'ageing up' the text, these fans identified with *iCarly* in relation to their own gendered/generational subjectivities by expanding on the text and drawing on their own knowledge/experiences to 'flesh out' the characters. These practices, a central appeal of tweendom, are also acts of collaborative interpretation as Baym (2000) argues that such reading practices offer the "opportunity to negotiate personal and private socioemotional issues in a public space" (92-3).

The 'collaborative interpretation' and sense of community in the GS can be understood to be buffered by an 'individualized collectivity'—a "projection of self-identity on to a collective, resulting in a distinct sense of belonging" (Sandvoss 2005, 64). Indeed, the distinct sense of belonging that this group described lead them to consider tweendom, albeit humorously, as a "cult" (**GS17**, 13/1/10). Both their age, and experiences informed their interpretations and reading strategies, which they not only considered a mark of distinction between themselves and the target demographic, but which they also claimed set tweendom apart, as an "interconnected" fandom, from more fragmented "adult" fandoms such as those attached to *Glee* and *Supernatural* (**GS4**, 12/1/10). In this context however, *iCarly* fandom was singled out as more fragmented than other tween fandoms due to its "canon ship dynamics" (ibid). Considering that this discussion took place *after* the influx of 'interlopers'—those who are in "a space where they are not always wanted and where others think they do 'not

belong'" (Williams 2013, 335)—of whom most were exclusively canon (Seddie or Creddie) shippers, it suggestively highlights the extent to which the incursion of the producer had disrupted and fragmented the GS, and indeed threatened the sense of community that formed a central pleasure.

"It's No Secret! I AM Watching You": Fangirl Shame, Defence, and Inter-Fandom

Having established some of the ways in which fans in the Groovy Smoothie (GS) made sense of, and engaged with *iCarly,* as well as the importance of the community in shaping fans' readings and interpretations, in this section I attend to the moments leading up to and immediately after Schneider joined the GS. In this context I focus on fans' responses to the creator/producer entering the fan space and the ways they negotiated, defended, and legitimised their fan culture and fangirl performance. In their study of young female fans, Nash and Lahti (1999) conclude that fandom offers girls "ambivalent pleasures" (83), often marked by an oscillation between claiming and disclaiming a fan identity mixed with, on the one hand, a desire for 'communal validation', and on the other to avoid seeming overly invested, excessive, or pathologically obsessed. In other words, laying claim to a fan identity, especially one associated with teenage girls, means negotiating a desire to articulate their fandom but a hesitancy to be aligned with the fangirl stereotype.

While fans tend to delegitimise and pathologise other fans or fandoms in order to elevate their own (Busse 2013; Hills 2012; Williams 2013), what emerges in this case study is that rather than distance themselves from the negative connotations of the fangirl, several fans instead (initially) emphasised and aligned themselves (rhetorically) with these qualities. This strategy stands in contrast to fans in Chapter Four whereby they emphasised, via language, some of the most mockable characteristics of the fangirl stereotype to present themselves as 'valued' fans, but appeared to resist 'fangirl as pathology' and reclaim the stereotype as powerful. In the GS, although such identification may function as a defence strategy and constitute affectionate self-deprecation, it can (and to some extent should) be understood as suggestive of a degree of internalised shame; a way of shaming oneself before the Other has the opportunity to judge or cast shame on them.

As a defence strategy, shaming oneself appeared to function in two key ways. Firstly, it can be understood as a form of fan protectionism and boundary maintenance (Busse 2013; Hills 2012), although rather than warding off other fans it was instead a form of defence against, and possibly even intended to function as a warning for Schneider. Secondly, and paradoxically, it can also be understood as a bid for fan symbolic capital and status. Despite fans' underlying discomfort with Schneider's presence, many also expressed excitement and described how privileged they felt to be able to communicate with him. Most of the original members in the GS suggested they had grown up with Schneider's sitcoms, so engaging with him was likely quite meaningful in relation their younger selves. In his presence then, the performance of fandom heightened, the desire to display one's fan credentials intensified, and as part of this, fans adopted the pathologising language that is commonly associated with the fangirl, perhaps in anticipation of shame or as a result of their awareness of their own cultural devaluation. As the final section of this chapter will demonstrate however, the fans that were around to welcome Schneider to the GS later reversed this position; with the influx of new members to the GS, a new hierarchy cutting across other divisions emerged, and existing members distanced themselves from the 'interloping' fangirls they considered inappropriately 'crazy' and disruptive.

I begin this section with an examination of fan speculation and bids for legitimisation pre-Schneider, before then turning to an analysis of fan shame drawing on the work of Sandra Bartky (1990), Sara Ahmed (2014[2004]), and Lyn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012). In the context of Schneider's arrival, I then consider the ways in which fans invoked, and repurposed fangirl stereotypes, and their use of pathologising, infantalising, and misogynistic discourses that accompanied these rhetorical strategies as part of their defence and bid for status. Within this, I examine inter-fandom dynamics in terms of how *iCarly* fans in the GS distinguished themselves from, and imagined other/Other *iCarly* fans in communities outside of LJ.

'Textual Gifts' and Legitimising Desires

Before joining the GS, Schneider did not have a visible online presence, yet in the months before his first appearance, fans speculated on several occasions about the

possibility he was already lurking. Such speculation was based on content identified within the show or *iCarly*'s webisodes that they considered to be catering to their desires, which I refer to as 'textual gifts'. Four months prior to Schneider's reveal, **GS4** (16/11/08) posted a link to a new iCarly.com video, 'Hey, What am I Licking?', in which Spencer is seen blindfolded and licking a guitar (Figure 2.4). **GS4** demanded, "Tell me Dan Schneider isn't lurking and doing this on purpose. Tell me!". **GS2** (16/11/08) agreed they were similarly convinced, that there had been too many coincidences and Schneider must be "lurking".

Figure 2.4: Spencer licking a guitar.

Rather than focusing on the usual main characters, this video was about Spencer, and as **GS2** excitedly exclaimed: "we have been fangirling and its [*sic*] about him being IRRESISTABLE and crazy women wanting him". Consequently it was proposed that Schneider was aware of their fangirling, and the video had been tailor-made for the desiring Spencer fangirls, or the "crazy women" like themselves. I would argue that this exchange could be considered a claim for recognition or legitimisation; a rhetorical bid for the acceptance and approval of the producer. While other fandoms similarly speculate about their influence over the text, as Jenkins (2006a[1995]) notes of *Twin Peaks* fans for instance, in the context of fangirls and displays of sexuality there is perhaps more at stake within a proposition such as this.

Zubernis and Larsen (2012) argue that female fans consistently wrestle with their own desires when they fall outside the authorised discourse, that:

> fandom itself buys into the stereotype of the overly emotional, crazy fangirl on a regular basis. In fact, fans have internalised such a strong sense of shame that they've projected it onto the objects of their affection, expressing their fear that the celebrities are either terrified or disgusted by their own female fans (69)

In the GS, although **GS2** made a clear link between fangirls and their devalued status as "crazy", in this instance fans were speculating about whether their desires were in fact *authorised*. Rather than projecting their sense of shame, they positioned themselves as a potentially valued audience, insofar as the video may have been inspired by their fan performance. For this reason, as a strategy, it can be seen as an attempt to legitimise their fangirl performances via authorial approval, and thus a way through which to potentially absolve themselves from shame or judgement.

Historically, women have not been constructed as "desiring subjects capable of objectification" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 68), but instead as "'silly girls who are in love' with a male celebrity, and therefore unable to separate fantasy from reality (Bury 2005)" (ibid). Indeed, this equation figures largely in the construction and devaluation of the fangirl. This perceived inability, if not mere delusion, is then often equated with being 'crazy', just as female fans' desire is redefined as irrational, over-invested, and 'hysterical'. Here, fans were not only acknowledging this equation, but also adopting it by referring to themselves as "crazy" for fangirling over a male character. Speculating about 'textual gifts' from the producer to the fangirls may lessen the feeling of, or reduce the threat of being referred to, or thought of, as 'crazy', thus circumventing (the anticipation of) shame. If they were so easily dismissed as merely 'crazy', logic would suggest that their desires would *not* be catered to but de-legitimised, if only by exclusion, within authorised texts. Conversely, if their desires are catered to and their modes of engagement acknowledged, their fan performance and their desires are legitimised and hence, neither the fangirls or their behaviour automatically dismissed as "crazy". Of course, such speculation can also be considered a reflection of fangirls' (self-)conscious awareness that they are likely to be shamed and deemed 'crazy', but rather than outright projecting their shame, they instead managed it, or attempted to thwart it, via a pursuit of potential authorial approval, whether or not that could ever be realised. In the abstract sense in which these fans proposed, the possibility that Schneider was aware of them, and gifting them with content tailored to their fangirl interests, was clearly appealing.

It is then particularly significant that when Schneider did appear, any sense that fans may have had regarding his approval diminished, and was quickly replaced with self-deprecation/shaming in the face of potential judgement. Accordingly, this scenario adds further weight to the argument that fangirls tend "to avoid attention because they're sure it will be the *wrong* kind of attention" (Coppa 2007, n.p); that is, their practices, interests, and the affective nature of their investments will be most likely delegitimised or mocked. It seems then that it is one thing to imagine they might be surveilled and approved, yet it is quite another to be in the position of discovering that they *have* been surveilled and learning that their fannish identities and interests may not have been as welcomed or catered to as they suspected. I now turn to the moment in which Schneider arrived, and begin to consider the implications of the producer's presence in a 'transformational' (obsession_inc 2009) fandom such as the GS in order to contextualise the analysis of fangirl shame that follows.

Schneider's Arrival and Surveillance

On March 7th 2009, there were reports at the GS that Schneider had created a YouTube account and rumours about him being spotted at TV.com. As replies flooded in, it was suggested that someone should invite him to join the GS, but rather than take this request seriously, **GS2** (7/3/09) explained that they believed Schneider was already a secret member, lurking at both the GS and an affiliated LJ community. Although this was based entirely on the perceptions held by a minority of fans, **GS5** (7/3/09) took this as implicit confirmation that Schneider was observing them: "HOLY CRAP I *knew* Dan was watching us this whole time". Having come to the conclusion that he was already 'secretly' watching them, **GS5** addressed him directly, proudly exclaiming that they had created an LJ account for him with his very own "snazzy username" in case he wanted to be an official member. Shortly after, Schneider made his very first post in the same thread, seemingly in reply to **GS5**'s comments. He wrote:

> It's no secret! I AM watching you. Haha... no, actually, I only learned about livejournal [*sic*] and groovysmoothie [*sic*] last night […] As you guys have figured out by now, I'm reaching out to the fans of iCarly (and other TV shows I do) on the web in a big way. I'm not sure why I didn't do this years ago. In just a few days, I've already connected with tons of people who like iCarly and lots of interesting comments [...] I'm psyched I find [*sic*] out about this place, and I look forward to hangin' with you guys! (Schneider, 7/3/09).

We might note here that Schneider claimed he was new to the GS, that he had not been watching them prior to his reveal as fans had speculated. Whether or not he had been watching the community for an extended period of time is not possible to verify, but after joking about the possibility the producer was certainly keen to dispel this myth in his first post. Yet, either way, it is a logical conclusion that he *was* hanging around the GS, at least in this particular thread, since he appeared seemingly out of nowhere and responded to **GS5**'s comment the very same day. Instead, his comment functions to imply it was a mere coincidence that he happened to have heard about the community the same day that fans thought he might be lurking, and miraculously found a thread where a fan had addressed him.

The manner in which Schneider invited himself, and suddenly appeared in fandom is potentially problematic. Although **GS5**'s comments could be considered an indirect invitation, there was apparently no attempt on Schneider's part to obtain approval before his unveiling, or to contact the moderators of the site to be officially introduced to the community. He simply interrupted a thread and announced his presence. Indeed, later reflecting on the lack of choice they had in him joining the GS, **GS18** (31/8/09) compared interactions with Schneider on LJ to Facebook; noting that the main distinction is that one has a choice who to befriend on Facebook, whereas they had no choice in the matter of Schneider befriending them. Although LJ does not offer the same form of permission as Facebook's friend function, there is a sense in which fans were essentially rendered powerless, denied their autonomy, and the right to choose whether or not they wished to befriend Schneider and host him in their community. Despite a relative lack of privacy, online fan spaces often hold a perception of privacy in which fans may feel that only other fans are present, thereby occupying a "middle ground" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 19). Although the GS was an open space, accessible without registering as a member, and the concept of the fourth wall is somewhat tenuous, if not entirely out of date, in the context of social media and the collapse of traditional 'divisions' between fans and TPTB (see Chapter Three), in comparison to spaces such as Tumblr and Twitter, the GS at least had the *guise* of a private members club.

Fans may have joked about Schneider's lurking, but the GS was a fanfiction heavy 'transformational' space, and transformational fans are not usually well-known to the

creators, nor desire to be; they "are, most definitely, the *non-sanctioned* fans" (obsession_inc 2009, n.p). Given the nature of GS fans' readings and transformations of the text, it is unlikely they would be considered the kinds of fans to be sanctioned by TPTB. In turn, this may go some way in explaining why fans anticipated shame/judgement when Schneider made his presence known. Moreover, Schneider's presence (and instigating shame) could alter the dynamics of the fangirl-friendly community in which adult-natured readings of the text were prioritised, and thus come to affect fans' creative production. Indeed, border policing fan spaces is especially gendered and inherently bound up with the cultural expectations of shame (Zubernis and Larsen 2012) and in particular, the shaming of their fan(girl) practices. As I will go on to discuss now, through an analysis of fans' reactions to Schneider's unveiling, shame itself has also been theorised as a gendered condition (Bartky 1990).

The Gendering of (Fangirl) Shame and Self-Pathlogisation: Aligning with Negative Stereotypes

In *Femininity and Domination,* Bartky (1990) argues that for men, shame "may be intelligible only in light of the presupposition of male power... in women shame may well be a mark and token of powerlessness" (84). This gendered type of shame is not tied specifically to the body, but it is "a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy" that is "profoundly disempowering" (85). Bartky (1990) continues:

> the need for secrecy and concealment that figures so largely in the shame experience is disempowering as well for it isolates the oppressed from one another and in this way works against the emergence of a sense of solidarity (97).

What is more, Zubernis and Larsen (2013) argue that the act of concealment can be seen as gendered, "since women take on an identity that is under constant surveillance by self and others, they often feel pulled to construct a façade to protect the true self underneath" (61). According to Ahmed (2014[2004]) "crucial to the work of shame" is a "double play of concealment and exposure" (104); "[feeling] like an exposure" (103), of being "visible and not ready to be visible (Erikson cited in ibid), it thus involves a "desire for concealment" (Darwin cited in ibid). Underlying this double play is a certain irony then, whereby "the desire to take cover and to be covered presupposes the failure of cover; in shame, one desires cover precisely because one has already been exposed to others" (ibid, 104). In the GS, the desire for concealment

occurred before even Schneider's first appearance, thus displaying their capacity for shame at the mere threat of being exposed. Although as discussed above, **GS2** had excitedly speculated about Schneider catering to fangirls in the months prior, once his presence became a realistic possibility any underlying discomfort they had became manifest, encapsulated in one single word "*hide*".

Although at this point, shaming by Schneider was only anticipated, Bartky (1990) argues that shame does *not* necessarily demand an audience or an Other to pass judgement. Shame can succeed alone, only requiring an internalised audience with the capacity to judge, "hence internalized standards of judgement" (86). **GS2**'s (7/3/09) use of *hide* (* to indicate an action) is significant in suggesting that shame was experienced with only the possibility of an audience. The use of just one word could indicate a loss for words, but that the one word expressed was *just* the verb and denoted (through asterisks) that they were *doing* the hiding, rather than an explanation as to *why* they were "actually a little afraid for him to see what we do", suggests there were no words at all. They were temporarily rendered silent and hence disempowered. Indeed, **GS2** asked other fans to ask Schneider the questions they wanted answers to whilst they went to hide. Such was the anticipation, or expectation of shame in the event that Schneider *did* appear, it seems it was considered necessary to conceal or protect from the inevitable embarrassment or shame that comes with being discovered as a fan(girl). Arguably it was inevitable, because as Zubernis and Larsen (2012) note, terms such as 'obsessive' or 'crazy' have been thrown so often that fandom has bought into the stereotype and come to expect such accusations, and thus "internalised a significant degree of shame about being a fan" (57).

When Schneider did appear, fans reactions revealed much of the same, with **GS19** (8/2/09) and **GS20** (8/2/09) stating that they felt "awkward" and "self-conscious", and **GS21** (8/2/09) simply stating "*shame face*" to denote their shame and its physical manifestation. In the shame experience, "recognition" is not a necessity; one need not identify with the perspective of the one from whom shame is called forth in order to feel ashamed (Bartky 1990). In the same way, fans need not necessarily *believe* that they are 'crazy' or 'obsessive' to feel or internalise shame. It may be enough to only be aware of such accusations or stereotypes to recognise the possibility that they could be similarly applied to themselves. Given the widespread circulation of negative

fangirl stereotypes it is unlikely that GS fans did *not* recognise their potential to be shamed, while their extensive use of pathologising language, for both the self and others, would also suggest that they were keenly aware of the particular nature of their devaluation. Indeed, Bartky (1990) argues that even if one does not recognise themselves in the perspective of the one from whom shame is called forth, there is still "identificatory recognition" insofar as how one *is* as one is seen is recognised in the eyes of the judge (86).[65]

Although when Schneider first arrived he appeared ignorant to fan practices rather than overtly judgemental, in *anticipation* of judgement and in recognition of how and on what basis he may potentially shame them, fans were first reluctant to discuss their practices. Then, in their eventual confessions, they clearly pathologised themselves and their activities. Schneider was quick to address fans' fears about his presence, although he did so with little understanding or seriousness, claiming to find the very notion humorous. In reference to **GS2**'s comment (above) that they were scared for him to see what they do, Schneider (7/3/09) stated: "it made me chuckle", a mildly mocking comment that failed to take seriously fans' concerns. When fans attempted to explain, he claimed to not understand "EXACTLY" (ibid, original emphasis) what they meant, and went on to assure them that they need not worry about hurting his feelings, that they were entitled to express their opinions including any negative ones because "that's what forums are for, right?" (ibid). Fans repeatedly attempted to explain that they were not concerned with a lack of freedom to criticise, but Schneider (8/3/09) continued in his sentiments that he did not expect "EVERYONE to love "EVERYTHING I write & produce" (original emphasis).

Earlier in the post, Schneider had claimed that his brief appearance at TV.com[66] and his subsequent visit to the GS was his first foray into fandom. It would therefore follow that Schneider would not necessarily understand the form and function of different fan spaces, although there is a level of plausible deniability and/or questionability to the veracity of these claims. Furthermore, whether or not he understood fan activities and the reasons behind fans' unease, the display of

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[65] See also: Ahmed (2014[2004], 106).
[66] At TV.com Schneider was promptly asked to leave after the moderator assumed his username to be a hoax, thus he moved on to the GS.

ignorance/naïveté, and his claims to be a fandom 'newbie' pushed fans to be explicit about fan culture and teach him about fandom, such as defining for him what shipping means.[67] Although this cast fans as the educator, thus assigning them a seemingly authoritative power in this knowledge exchange, fans' shame was also highlighted by repetition as they were continually pushed to be more explicit about the reasons behind their reserve and embarrassment. The ways in which fans began to express their reasons ranged from the most subtle: "when I'm posting like, fics and stuff on here, you'll be able to read them, which makes me a bit nervous" (**GS20**, 8/3/09), to the most explicit and self-deprecating, revealing the extent to which the anticipation of shame already countered a sense of solidarity, which then become more pronounced in the following months.

In order to finally make clear to "poor Dan [who] doesn't realise what he has gotten himself into" (**GS7**, 7/3/09), **GS5** (8/3/09) candidly and directly addressed the producer:

> Dan, it isn't that we want to say negative things. It is that we are all horrible perverts who like to talk about NAUGHTY things. About a nick show. They are almost ALL positive. Just... not... work safe, all of the time. It isn't the only thing groovysmoothie [*sic*] is about. Normally it is for general discussion. But, yeah, there are a whole lot of dirty thoughts in the archives.

Coming 'clean' to Schneider about one of the community's central preoccupations: "talking about naughty things", and its history as a space in which to share "dirty thoughts", **GS5** did not refer to the innuendos in the show that were most often the catalysts for such discussions. Rather, these activities were attributed to the community members' nature as "horrible perverts".

In alignment with their communal reading practices, one of the first things GS fans were excited to ask Schneider about, or praise him for, were *iCarly*'s innuendos. Earlier in the thread, **GS22** (7/3/09) had mentioned to Schneider about *iCarly*'s innuendos to which he replied: "gosh, I have NO IDEA what you mean. Hmmmmm. WHAT innuendo? ;)" (original emphasis). Although fans did not appear to believe

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[67] Although Schneider did not spend much time at TV.com it does seem unlikely that he would have been wholly unaware of shipping. Moreover, he explicitly stated that he was very much involved in running the icarly.com website where he would have access to fan comments sent to the site, of which many most likely referred to ships.

Schneider's claim: "Oh don't feign innocence" (**GS22**, 8/3/09), his comment nevertheless functioned to shut down any further queries regarding such content. As a result of this denial of intention/authorship, it is therefore possible that **GS5**'s (8/3/09) care to *not* attribute fan readings back to the text, and by extension to Schneider himself, was a position pushed upon them, and thus their readings/discussions could only be attributed to fans' deviant tastes instead. This move was in stark contrast to the ways in which the community had traditionally approached and considered these aspects of the text as decidedly transparent. Under Schneider's surveillance however, this was reversed and fans were cast as "horrible perverts" for interpreting and discussing a tween show in a "dirty" way.

All being said, if demeaning treatment is anticipated due to the perception of oneself as "giving the appearance of someone of lesser worth" (Deigh in Bartky 1990, 86), it seems curious that **GS5** (8/3/09) would demean the whole community by referring to them as "horrible perverts", intrinsically positioning them as a group of lesser worth and also delegitimising and pathologising fans' reading practices and pleasures in the text. As most fans instinctively try to avoid negative representations (Busse 2013), and many will avoid the 'fangirl' label at all costs, precisely because of its associations with an unruly, unrestrained, 'excessive' sexuality (Bury 2005; Busse 2013; Williams 2011a), "horrible perverts" stands out as having particularly strong negative connotations.

Bartky argues that shame as a response to demeaning treatment one fears they may invite, needs to be distinguished from the shame of those who are routinely subjected to such treatment. In the context of fangirls and female-oriented fandom, this distinction is crucial, because fangirls are routinely subjected to demeaning treatment. Even if GS fans had not been personally subjected to such treatment and/or victimised by such discourses, they were apparently aware that their age, gender, and fan identities made them primary candidates for shaming, and so anticipated it, or pre-empted it by adopting the negative rhetoric themselves. Thus, fangirls' internalisation of shame in "reaction to a threat" (Bartky 1990, 86) posed by a potentially judgemental audience, and their subsequent shaming strategies should be considered within a broader cultural context in which they are consistently shamed by others. Moreover, it may be that the prevalence of fangirls' self-shaming strategies is a

product of their devalued and stigmatised position, functioning/masquerading as a defence strategy (and shaming of others a self-legitimisation strategy), and is not simply or exclusively an internalisation of negative discourses. Although this is an argument I expand on in Chapter Three in relation to inter-fandom shaming in the wake of fans' representation in an episode of *iCarly*, it is worth highlighting here in relation to Bartky's argument.[68]

Prior to Schneider's disruption, as argued in the previous section of this chapter, the communal practices of the GS, in particular their modes of reading and fangirl performances had been a matter of distinction, a source of pride. Once they had an audience, and a threat of judgement, fans claimed the 'crazy' fangirl identity before they could be shamed by the Other; a "[ritual] of self-shaming undertaken in order to bear more easily a shaming they anticipated" (Bartky 1990, 89). Schneider, as audience (or potential judge), was a catalyst in this context, insofar as the word "crazy", and others like it such as "rabid", were applied for the benefit of the Other. Although in this case, self-pathologisation functioned primarily as a defence, as I discuss in the following section it also functioned as a form of fan protectionism and boundary maintenance—a bid to protect the integrity of their space.

Fangirl Warning and Defence

While the use of pathologising language in the anticipation of shame revealed the extent to which it may have already been internalised, such language was also implicated in fans' border policing against outside (read: Schneider) interference or potential judgement. In the following example, 'fangirl' was positively claimed for the self and the GS clearly demarcated as a fangirl-friendly space by way of indicating to Schneider that fans should *not* be shamed for their interests in the space *they* created for them to enjoy them.

In a notably telling way, **GS2** (8/3/09) attempted to explain to Schneider the reasons for fans' unease with him joining the community:

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[68] A potential distinction between the two chapters is that fans in the GS shamed themselves *before* and pre-empting (potential) shaming from the producer, whereas on Blogspot, self- and intra-fandom shaming came *after* more direct shaming from the producer in the form of their in-text representation.

> I actually think one of the reasons people are a tad nervous is because of the kinds of things we post around here. We enjoy our crazy, but here we can do so without feeling crazy.
> I'm not sure if you read the user info, but our community was kind of founded on Spencer love and the idea that Spencer has a (past) porn career - and we can't talk and/or fangirl about it anywhere else.
> Awwwwwwwkwwaaard.

Although, once again, the 'crazy' fangirl stereotype was invoked, **GS2** also unashamedly claimed the 'crazy' as something they consciously enjoy. Whether in anticipation of the accusation, a tongue-in-cheek statement, or recognition of how their behaviour may look to the uninitiated, the comment suggests that the GS was a designated space in which to go 'crazy'; indeed they could be 'crazy', without *feeling* 'crazy' because the community accepted, if not expected it as a valid/valued form of fannish engagement, and nobody was shaming them for it. In suggesting that they enjoyed their 'crazy' it could be understood as a knowing reclamation of the term— those who are aware of their 'crazy' are perhaps less 'crazy' than those who are unaware of the nature of their behaviour. Thus in this way, 'crazy fangirl' is a performative and knowing act, and claiming it as such guards against others assuming it is either natural or essential to being both/either female and a fan. The comment also functioned as a warning of sorts, seeming to urge Schneider not to make them feel (negatively) 'crazy', and make clear that fans were nervous because it was considered a safe space in which they could enjoy their 'crazy', and they did not want that security compromised by anyone—not even the show's creator.

GS2 also directed attention to the user information (as discussed earlier) in which it was clearly stated that fan discussions were of an adult nature and of central importance to the community; that indeed the GS existed because, and above else, for that very reason. Also of importance is that it was stated that the GS was the *only* space in which they could fangirl and discuss their Pornstar!Spencer love. Due to its perceived uniqueness it was therefore especially crucial to defend GS boundaries from intrusion, preserve its original aims against any attempts to change its focus, and protect the integrity of the space. Thus, although Schneider was a privileged guest, even he was to be directed to the community's mission statement and expected to abide by it. Preserving the nature of the community was clearly of great importance, more so than accommodating or making exceptions for Schneider. While the

awkwardness of the situation was acknowledged, the message and territorial claim appears clear: the GS existed as a space to be 'crazy' and it was to be diligently maintained and protected from outside forces that may shame fangirls for their performances. Having looked at self-shaming as a defence strategy, and an example of how identifying as 'crazy' functioned in boundary maintenance, I now turn to consider the ways in which fans' variously aligned and distanced themselves from fangirl stereotypes as a mark of distinction in inter-fandom.

Fangirl Stereotypes as Axes of Distinction and Inter-Fandom Hierarchies

As work on inter-fandom (Busse 2013; Hills 2012; Williams 2013) has illustrated, fans often create distinctions between themselves and others/Others, creating internal hierarchies whereby no matter where "one is situated in terms of mockable fannish behaviour, there is clearly a fannish subgroup even more extreme than one's own, and it is that group that one can feel secure in not being a part of" (Busse 2013, 78). Structuring these dismissals and divisions then is a "furious disidentification", a claim of "we're not like that" (Brunsdon 2006, 51). In policing other fans' behaviour, distinctions are often drawn on the axes of gender, age, fannish activity, investment, and affect, amongst others. In particular, gender discrimination is implicated within, and tends to inform most lines of division, as it occurs "on the level of the fan, the fan activity, and the fannish investment" (Busse 2013, 75). Furthermore, "even issues of age often are framed in terms of gender, so that girl and girly become age and gender dismissals" (ibid, 74-75).[69] Therefore, whether stated or implied, fangirl functions to symbolise both age *and* gender dismissals.

If the figure of the fangirl is already at (or at least near) the bottom of a fan hierarchy, how then would one group of fangirls distinguish themselves from an other group or disidentify from an Other? What would an internal fangirl hierarchy look like, in what ways would one seek to delegitimise an Other in order to claim for themselves fan symbolic capital, and to what extent is the fangirl stereotype leveraged in these distinctions? Keeping these questions in mind, in what follows I consider inter-fandom distinctions that emerged within the Groovy Smoothie (GS) upon Schneider's

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[69] See also: Hills (2012) refers to the dismissal of "gender plus age or generation" as "gender plus" (123).

arrival. Initiated by fans themselves, these can be understood as a feature of GS fans' attempts to defend and legitimise their culture under the producer's surveillance**.** This section is significant in illustrating that the meanings and uses of 'fangirl' shifted when applied to self and Others, often operating across the dual-definition of fangirl as playful and derogatory although, as above, not simply in terms of positive/self, negative/other. It also serves to illuminate the extent to which inter-fandom distinctions coalesced around the figure of the fangirl.

Aligning with Fangirl Stereotypes as Distinction/Elevation Strategy

As this chapter has illustrated thus far, upon Schneider's arrival fans rhetorically aligned themselves with the negative connotations of the fangirl and 'fangirl as pathology'. Their self-pathologisation, although quite possibly shame internalised made manifest, also became implicated in their distinctions between themselves and Others. Yet, *contra* the logic of fan distinctions and border policing whereby one ascribes positive values to their own fandom in an attempt to exclude others, and positions Others as more crazy in some way, some GS fans claimed themselves to be *more* "wacky", *more* "crazy", and *more* "rabid" than fans elsewhere. With distinctions based on both fannish activities and fan space, it seems the strategy of aligning themselves with these terms was to elevate them as bigger and better fans, and thus to Schneider, the best he could interact with. For instance, **GS23** (30/3/09) stated in a comment thanking Schneider for his involvement at the GS: "LJ is where some of the most rabid fans dwell. (I include myself in this, of course, as I'm in some 250 comms for various fandoms)". This comment not only implies that LJ was considered a more extreme, or "rabid" fan space than others, but there was also an attempt here to prove their fan credentials by claiming to be in 250 communities. With their enthusiasm, devotion, and experience simultaneously highlighted, **GS23**'s claim that LJ was host to some of the most "rabid" fans appears particularly authoritative. While they did not suggest what it was exactly that made LJ fans distinctive, other fans drew clearer lines of division in a thread when Schneider first appeared.

When Schneider referred to his experience at TV.com[70] it seemed to prompt **GS2** (7/3/09) and **GS7** (7/3/09) to distinguish themselves from the "crazies" they considered populating the other site. Based on ships that they appeared to support at TV.com (canon plausible/canon sanctioned), TV.com fans were positioned as *less* 'crazy' than GS fans, although less 'crazy' in the sense that they were not fannish *enough* to ship pairings outside the mainstream (non-canonically sanctioned, slash, or "crack" pairings) as they did. In this way, fans in the GS may have been positioned as *more* 'crazy', but in the sense that they were *more* fannish, with comments 'throwing shade' at TV.com fans for not 'doing fandom right'. To put it another way, it can be understood as a fannish version (and gendered reversal) of the plus male/minus male dichotomy Bury (2005, citing Spender 1985) describes in her work "whereby those practices associated with [affirmational or 'mainstream' fandom] are measured against those associated with [transformational fandom] and found to be lacking" (10).[71] Indeed, the intra-fandom distinctions, as well as relying on divisions of age, longevity in fandom, and notions of authenticity (Williams 2013) were largely infused with, and seen operating across, this very dichotomy whereby the Other was considered 'lacking' in terms of their choice of fannish practices (even when they were 'too much' in terms of their fangirl-esque behaviour).

This reading of the subtle distinctions and delegitimisation of TV.com fandom was then further substantiated by a comment in which it was designated, by **GS2**, as "no where near wacky enough" to ship the actors (Jennette [Sam] and Nathan [Freddie]) together: "They wouldn't know what to do. (Well, at least on THAT forum…)." While it was implied that real person shipping/RPF is "wacky", **GS2** made it equally clear they did not consider TV.com fans to be knowledgeable, "fandomy" or experienced enough to know *how* to ship two actors together. In this way a distinction was made between transformative fan practices and those considered more mainstream (or at least less transformational) and found lacking; a demarcation that tacitly elevated the GS, (in which RPF was present) as a more daring, sophisticated, "fandomy" fandom.

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[70] TV.com, owned by television network CBS, provides episode descriptions, reviews, cast and crew information, recaps, quotes, trivia, and a discussion forum. TV.com is not centred around fan creativity like LJ. The *iCarly* board had a fanfiction thread, but it was positioned as a unique privilege rather than the norm.

[71] If affirmational/transformational map on to gender (male/female) as obsession_inc (2009) describes, and the 'plus male/minus male' dichotomy measures the feminine against the masculine and finds the former 'lacking' as Bury (2005) explains, then the fannish version can be seen to reverse this gendered dichotomy in privileging fangirl modes.

As noted by Rebecca Williams (2013) the "quest for apparent authenticity—for proving one's credentials as a genuine and 'proper' fan—is common across fan cultures and constructed by the community in question" (336). In the GS, fans' credentials were proved, and symbolic capital sought, via distinctions between the kinds of practices one was associated with. Although pathologising language was utilised, in this context it was aimed less at others to 'Other' or delegitimise their practices that were considered more *negatively* crazy (usually those associated with female fans), but was rather claimed for the self to distinguish them as *more* fannish, based on the "crazy" fannishness and transformational/subversive nature of their practices. To be a fangirl in this context, and partake in activities associated with fangirls and usually mocked as a consequence, was to occupy a higher position in their hierarchy. To claim 'crazy fangirl' in a playful sense, and joke about their own passion was to be a more authentic, 'proper' fan. To be a valued member of the community was to signal one's fangirl status, acknowledging and ascribing positive values to their 'wackiness' as fandom 'proper'. To clearly mark their performance as "crazy" ironically functioned to position it as more fannish and thus attributed them 'fangirl capital'.

Gender/Age Axes and Distancing from Fangirl Stereotypes in Inter-Fandom Distinctions

It was not only fans that policed fan behaviour, Schneider himself turned to the GS to complain about fans in other spaces, namely those perceived to distil characteristics of the fangirl in its derogatory definition. In this context, 'fangirl as pathology' was forcefully reaffirmed, and distinctions solidified, along the axes of age and gender. In this section I illustrate how Schneider functioned as a (more direct) catalyst for inter-fandom distinctions within the GS and examine the ways in which labelling, and not labelling, oneself as a fangirl functioned to attract or ward off Othering and pathologisation. This is significant in suggesting that, just as claiming a fangirl identity and labelling a performance as such may function to alleviate oneself from derision, *not* claiming the term and leaving a performance unmarked, particularly if one is not performing according to the 'guidelines' set by the community, is to risk being seen and derided as a fangirl in the derogatory sense of the term.

The morning after Schneider joined the community he made a post thanking fans for their welcome and to let them know he had started using Twitter. While he admitted that Twitter was a good way to connect with fans, he was also quite dismissive of the platform, characterising it as an especially young and gendered space. Schneider (8/3/09) claimed that "twittering" made him feel "a friggin 12-year-old girl", and asked the GS why it couldn't have been named something with "at least a HINT of testosterone" because 'twittering' sounds like something one does "before ballet practice and shopping for cute skirts". These sentiments seem especially out of place in the GS in light of the fact that Schneider had been informed that it was a fangirl-friendly space. Although GS fans were not twelve years old, these statements are nevertheless misogynist and infantalising, and not wholly in keeping with the female majority demographic of the community. Of course, they are also especially demeaning of the target audience of his show. They could thus be read as an indirect way of shaming fans; although he wasn't specifically deriding GS fans, he was by implication mocking fangirls on Twitter. In this context, Schneider can be understood as a catalyst for the ensuing inter-fandom distinctions that were made, as predominantly new GS members were keen to 'disidentify' from Twitter fans.

After joining the community and establishing a presence online, Schneider began to ship-tease Seddie and Creddie shippers. A month after his gendered dismissal of Twitter, an "epic"[72] Creddie picture (Figure 2.5) was tweeted from Schneider's Twitter account that apparently upset a lot of Seddie shippers. With a swift increase in members at the GS (+500% within two months), thus ignited the ship wars that contributed to the community's demise.

Figure 2.5: Schneider's "epic" Creddie Picture.

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[72] Dan Schneider (@Dan Warp) Twitter Post, 9 April 2009, 5.55pm. http://twitter.com/DanWarp/statuses/1487358495.

Concerned with fan's comments on Twitter in response to the picture that referred to him as an "evil genius"(Schneider 10/4/09), Schneider turned to the GS to ask if he was gaining a reputation and whether he should stop posting and interacting with fans. In response to Schneider's query 98 comments were posted. Most fans reassured him and encouraged him to continue; yet, as part of their reassurance a number of fans cast distinctions between themselves in the GS and those on Twitter.

While Schneider was reminded that the GS was a more mature space overall: "Most of the people who commented here are adults, just so you know" (**GS24**, 10/4/09), distinctions were frequently based on age, experience, and longevity in fandom. In their comments a large number of fans stated their age and alluded to how their maturity afforded them the ability to appreciate and cope with spoilers and promo. For example, **GS25** (10/4/09) stated:

> Me personally, I'm fine with teasers. They don't torture me, although they used to when I was younger. I have learned to be patient and maybe the few bits of whining you're getting is from kids who have absolutely no patience. Pleeeeease don't stop what you're doing.

Twitter fans were cast as younger and less experienced, and imagined as too invested, to the point that they were unable to withstand a little ship teasing. While the following comment implies an age distinction it also clearly draws on pathologisation discourses:

> Hopefully a bit of adult interpretation will help --- People are pretty diverse. I like to think of them as normal people like you and me, and people who have significant emotional problems. Fortunately, the vast majority of people are normal. Unfortunately, being in the public spotlight exposes you to the nuts. The trade-off is how to accommodate the 99.9% of the fan base that are normal, while not doing something that will make the nuts violent (**GS26**, 10/4/09).

GS26's comment suggests that fans in the GS were the 99.9% of fandom that was "normal" and the vocal and "anonymous" "haters" (**GS27**, 10/4/09) the 0.1%, and thus not representative of fandom at large. Advising Schneider not to listen to certain fans, he was thus warned:

> try not to be so reactionary in this new cyber world we live in where mice want to be heard and try to roar like lions, … just because technology makes them heard above the din does not mean they deserve it (**GS28**, 10/4/09).

The minority of Twitter fans were deemed excessively loud and most undeserving of Schneider's attention, and cast here as particularly entitled.

In this context, notions of authenticity were also implicated. Not only were Twitter fans considered to be not "loyal" (**GS27**, 10/4/09), they were also not "true" (**GS29**, 10/4/09) fans, the suggestion being that "true fans would not react the way *they* do" (ibid), while "grateful" (**GS30**, 10/4/09) GS fans "craved" (**GS23**, 10/4/09) *any* information Schneider could offer. Since most comments taken together established that fans in the GS did *not* react negatively to Schneider's teasing, but positively welcomed any information he chose to privilege them with, GS fans rhetorically positioned themselves as the "true" (**GS29**) and "biggest" (**GS31**, 12/4/09) fans.

As this chapter has illustrated so far, there is an evident tension in the use of pathologising discourses and notions of investment, and the ways in which they are applied to the self and to Others as a mark of distinction. Although fans in this post were keen to disidentify from the fans Schneider was concerned about, there was still an imperative to demonstrate one's fannish investment and authenticate one's own fandom. Thus, when pitting themselves against fans deemed negatively 'crazy' and unnecessarily antagonistic, different terms and rhetorical strategies were adopted to position oneself more clearly, as "normal" compared to the "nuts" (**GS26**) Schneider complained about. Careful not to downplay their own investment, but maintaining distance from 'fangirl as pathology', **GS23** (10/4/09) highlighted their investment by swapping "crazy" for "hardcore", implying serious and dedicated rather than pathological.

Shippers and shipping were also heavily implicated in distinctions based on level of investment. Careful again not to minimise their own status, several GS fans explained that ships were not their sole reason for watching and they would enjoy *iCarly* whatever the outcome, thus distancing themselves from 'over-invested' shipping fangirls on Twitter:

> as much as I personally like Seddie, that is NOT why I watch the show and I'll continue to enjoy it no matter what pairings you go with. I think that most people people feel that way (**GS32**, 10/4/09).

In relation to shippers, more explicitly pathologised, gendered, and infantalised stereotypes were invoked in distinctions from entitled or Othered fans:

> Here's the thing about relationships in fandom...they make the fans CRAZY. I'm not even kidding. ESPECIALLY with the kind of adolescent fanbase iCarly has and, traitor to my sex here, the amount of GIRLS in the fandom (to be fair, I'm sure there's boys begging as well, but let's say that 98% will probably be girls) […] I don't want to scare you away because the majority of us are rational human beings […] It's dead scary to see the level of obsession some people have for things, when you first brave a fandom, but PLEASE stick around Mr Schneider. (**GS30**, 10/4/09)

While **GS30** went on to advise Schneider to "ignore… anything ANYONE says about shipping" (ibid), it was heavily implied that those to ignore were precisely (those perceived or stereotyped as) adolescent girls irrationally begging for, and scarily obsessed with, shipping and romance.

'Fan Dumb' and the Emergence of Intra-Fandom Distinctions

The qualities that fans often identified in their distinctions described above, especially those related to notions of entitlement, resemble those comprising the so-called "Fan dumb" trope. This fan trope is useful to refer to here as it also encapsulates some of the distinctions that emerged within intra-fandom and the tensions between 'newbie' and established GS members. According to *TV Tropes*:

> Fan Dumb is the underbelly [of fandom], where serious business becomes obsession… The key characteristics of a Fan Dumb tend to be someone with an over-developed sense of entitlement and/or victimization… and (usually) an under-developed sense of humour or perspective about the subject of their fandom, coupled with an obsessive level of an interest… They usually believe that the very fact that they are a fan of something either entitles them to special or exclusive treatment or that they are being persecuted by numerous different parties (the creator, the producers, other fans, the world at large, etc)… Although they tend to be louder than the rest of the fanbase combined, they are usually a decided minority in almost every fandom.[73]

'Fan Dumb' connotes excessive obsession, entitlement, immaturity, and a misplaced sense of superiority over other fans. These are characteristics of the Twitter fangirls that GS members in the thread discussed above repeatedly identified, objected to, and distinguished themselves from.

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[73] TVTropes. n.d. "Fan Dumb". http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FanDumb. [Accessed 3/2/14].

Those that distinguished themselves from 'entitled' Twitter fans appeared to be 'newbie' members at the GS, and were precisely those that were Othered by, and 'disidentified' from, original GS members once the community began to fragment. Indeed, in a comment posted some months later, **GS33** (14/2/10), an established GS member wrote: "Is [*sic*] nice to have someone to fangirl with but you guys sometimes are so fucking srs bzns" (abbreviation for 'serious business'). This comment is not only reflective of the fangirl stereotype, as one unable to separate fiction from reality, but it is also reminiscent of the definition offered above of Fan Dumb as "serious business becomes obsession". As I discuss in the following section, 'newbie' GS fans were criticised by original members for "sucking up" to Schneider on the occasions that he came to them with criticisms of other fans, and refusing to state any negative opinions, as though being a "true" fan means never criticising TPTB. Thus, while in inter-fandom distinctions, 'newbie' GS fans disidentified from Twitter fans perceived as complaining too much, in intra-fandom original GS members sought distance from 'newbies' who refused to express negative opinions at all. While more established members did not appear to believe complaining to lower one's status as a fan, newer fans apparently sought to defend the producer from it and devalued critics as lesser fans, as **GS33** (31/8/09) explained:

> someone left a comment [in my journal] saying that she/he thought one of the jokes in the show was very inappropriate and well some members gave her/him shit,and i [*sic*] was like wtf are you danwarp's police? There are things that only dan [*sic*] should respond to,but [*sic*] the problem is that some members think that when one person is expressing a negative opinion about the show they are being disrespectful to the creators (and get a fucking twist in their knickers) or a troll.

There was, it seems, much confusion regarding the acceptability of critiquing the show and/or Schneider (see Chapter Three), and in intra-fandom, it became somewhat of a dividing line[74] as more established members became less enthralled with Schneider's presence and the shifting dynamics and focus of the community as a result. Fan Dumb also suggests an antagonistic relationship with the creator/producer and the rest of fandom. While newer GS members (those more closely resembling affirmational fans, albeit within a transformational community) sought to maintain

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[74] Similarly, Brooker (2002) describes a "hostile stalemate" between so-called "gushers" and "bashers" in *Star Trek* fandom whereby their opposing views of the text were defined by their acceptance or denial of the creator's authority as author/over the text, thus fragmenting fandom (95-98).

amenable relations with Schneider, their affirmation of the producer added to the increasingly antagonistic relations with established members.

The Breakdown of the Groovy Smoothie: Intra-Fandom, Internal Fangirl Hierarchies, and Fandom Wank

Schneider as 'Authorised Fannish Text'

As part of the series on gender and fan culture on Henry Jenkins' blog, Suzanne Scott and Bob Rehak discussed the ramifications of the increase in ancillary material and producer-approved texts. Scott (2007b) argued that authorised texts "ultimately… mak[e] fangirlish modes of creativity/production more difficult" (n.p) as the narrative territory that fangirls play in becomes weighed down by "canonic masculine authority" (ibid). While acknowledging its paranoid quality, Scott (2007a) described this as "the culture industry's plot to quell fan production through increased consumption of their own "'authorized' fannish texts", with ancillary content functioning as "the new media-savvy equivalent of sending covert cease and desist letters" (n.p). What I wish to propose here is to consider Schneider himself as/like an 'authorised fannish text' as the producer's presence had a similar preventative effect on Groovy Smoothie (GS) fans' 'fangirlish' activities.

As part of the same discussion series, Cynthia Walker (2007) described her pessimism regarding the increase in (mostly male) producerly control over fan spaces that are mainly occupied by female fans. Walker proposed since "TPTB… have discovered the power of fandom… many of them would like to control it—mold it, guide it, strongly influence it—because there's nothing scarier than an unpredictable audience that thinks for itself" (n.p). As a community of older fans, the GS was likely an ideal fandom to engage with, but given its creative/productive nature, (in Walker's terms) also to guide, derail, even potentially control. Whether or not it was an intentional move on Schneider's part, it is quite clear from examining the community's archives that Schneider's presence had the effect of suppressing or making more difficult fan discussion, creativity, and production with fans describing a loss of identity, the need to self-censor, and a sense of parental control or surveillance. In the following section I consider the ways in which GS fans reasserted and reclaimed their fannish identities and pleasures in the text, resisting the changes to their community that were wrought

by the producer. In this context, and the fragmentation and eventual breakdown of the community, I examine intra-fandom distinctions and the restructuring of internal fangirl hierarchies as established members sought distance from the 'unsocialised' newbie fangirls with disparate interests in the text and the community.

Loss of Identity, Self-Censorship, and Reclamation of Space

In the months following Schneider's induction, the nature of the GS shifted to accommodate, and as a consequence of, the producer's presence. Faced with a rapidly changing environment, in terms of the fast-growing population of the community and the differently focused, producer-led discussions, expressions of discontent began to appear in the GS as the community became unrecognisable to the members that preceded him. One of the frequent criticisms was that activity mostly centred around his presence, that comments were only posted in response to him and not to other fans. In May 2009, just two months after his welcome, a post from Fandom Secrets, an anonymous confessional community was mirrored at the GS for comment (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: *iCarly* confession at Fandom Secrets

In the GS, there were mixed reactions to the post, with some claiming Fandom Secrets was for people that "don't have enough balls to speak their mind under their username" (**GS33**, 7/5/09) and that's its "evil" and full of "trolls" (**GS34**, 7/5/09). On the other hand, **GS5** (7/5/09) loved it because "it's great for kicking people into gear",

and many in the comments agreed that the secret was consistent with their observations of the decline in, and shifting nature of, activity in the community.

The rousing cry of the secret, to "kick it back into gear", was a clear attempt to encourage fans to start posting again and most importantly, to post independently from Schneider. It also functioned as an effort to encourage fans to reclaim their space, revitalise the community, and perform as they did before Schneider's welcome, thus highlighting the very performativity of their fandom. Implied within this was that Schneider's presence was not, and should not be, instrumental to their activities. In **GS2**'s (7/5/09) comment a loss of identity was expressed: "Like, we're known as the place that Dan is a member, and not so much for the awesome community we are. So while we're still really popular, I keep questioning why". **GS2** acknowledged the community's rising popularity, but suggests the GS was not known, or was no longer known as an awesome community in its own right, on its own terms, or for fans' own contributions, but instead only known by association with the producer. If posting had all but dried up outside of Schneider visibly posting, it failed to make any sense why or how the community could be popular for anything other than hosting the producer.

The fans involved in the discussion regarding the secret were predominantly original members and/or those that generally commented avidly. It was noted that the drastic increase in membership did not match with an increase in general fandom activity or busier comment threads outside of Schneider's posts. Taken together, the comments worked to cast the new members that joined after Schneider as those who did not comment independently. In this way established members appeared to be distinguishing themselves from the 'newbies' and those perceived to be only interested in fandom or the GS for the attention of the producer. In fact, for one new member involved in the discussion this emerging distinction was perhaps clear to them as they began their comment with a disclaimer that they hadn't "been here long enough to have a say" (**GS35**, 8/5/09). If not creating a hierarchy of sorts, the strategy at least created a distinction between original members that frequently and independently contributed to fandom and those that were there solely to interact with Schneider. In this one case, a new fan that *was* attempting to post independently of the producer was essentially rendered silent.

In late August, another link to Fandom Secrets was posted. Although the secret was several months old, and one of many, it sparked much discussion, confession, and once more a 'call to arms'. In the secret thread, various anonymous fans criticised Schneider as a "lord-and-master-type" (**FS anon**, 5/5/09) who was unable to take criticism, and complained about the fans that "suck up" (ibid) to him when he was upset or "BUTTHURT" (**FS anon**, 5/5/09) about negative opinions. As one poster stated: "If you like iCarly, you have to worship the ground the creator walks on. I miss the old fandom" (**FS anon**, 5/5/09). It was widely agreed within the group on Fandom Secrets that Schneider had ruined fandom: "his presence there makes me want to claw my eyes out" (**FS anon**, 5/5/09), but that it was difficult to speak up un-anonymously about it.

The most telling sentiments that highlight the extent to which Schneider, as 'authorised fannish text', suppressed fan production were, firstly that some fans felt uncomfortable sharing fanfiction, particularly Cam (Carly/Sam) femslash: "Fandom should be a fun place to let out your creative energy and fic ideas, not worry about what the creator is going to say because he's watching your every move" (**FS anon**, 6/5/09). Schneider's presence, and concern with what his opinions of fanfiction might be, had stifled creative energy. While it was recognised that he was not *always* present, and rarely anymore 'gatecrashed' posts that he did not start himself, there was a sense that he was omnipresent, always (potentially) invisibly watching them, and thus contributing creative content to fandom seemed especially precarious. Secondly, and the sentiment that strongly carried through to the GS was that:

> everyone's scared to say anything bad or make any of the crazy and cracky observations that made GS so much fun lest Dan see them. We should all just suck it up and ignore him and just act like he isn't watching us all the time (**FS anon**, 5/5/09).

While creating and sharing fanworks had become increasingly difficult under the producer's surveillance, the producerly presence and the accompanying sense that one needed to self-censor also constrained and/or derailed the kind of discussions, namely those of a sexual nature, that the community had been built on.

Indeed, shortly after Schneider arrived, **GS36** (13/3/09) asked whether there was "a danwarp [Schneider's online name] can't read this post setting?" because they couldn't

discuss their "interest in mr. trainor's [*sic*] parts", thus clearly illustrating a desire to comment freely without the producer's surveillance. When told there was no way to filter comments but Schneider was an adult, **GS36** retorted that their mother was an adult but they wouldn't say sexually explicit things in her presence. Reiterating the parent/child analogy, within a later discussion regarding the severe decline in perverted Spencer jokes, **GS18** (31/8/09) compared Schneider's presence to being friends with ones' mother on Facebook whereby "you have to watch what you say and do and that is not fun". It is not clear why Schneider was compared to a mother, rather than a father, although it could be seen as a strategy of feminisation in order to devalue. Nevertheless, the analogy points to a power imbalance between the older, masculine authority figure and the younger female fans. Moreover, fans' discomfort with the producer's presence can arguably be seen to involve not only tensions around generational power imbalances, but also laying claim to a sexual identity, or (stereo)typical fangirl identity in the presence of an older male authority figure. Despite being predominantly young adult fans, the seniority of the producer and the surveillance of a parent-like figure altered what was considered acceptable and what was "over the line", and fans began to "police the boundaries of their own fannishness" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 71). With the producer present, and fans' wishing to discuss sexualised content, the boundaries of what was acceptable and 'over the line' shifted quite significantly to accommodate him. Not only were GS fans "cut off from their own exploration of [sexual] desire" (ibid, 66), but cut off from their pleasures in the text and the community that had initially fuelled much of their fandom.

In an attempt to reclaim their identity, reassert their agency, and reinstate the community's original nature, fans agreed to "to perv it up" (**GS5**, 31/8/09), highlighting the knowingness of their fangirl performance. **GS21** (31/8/09) proposed they make more "perverted Spencer jokes!" and asked "Should we start with cucumber spankings or Spencer finding cute boys in the laundry room? ;)". No longer censoring themselves, **GS18** (21/8/09) demanded, "we need fan fic fast", and declared it "a pervy party post". The proposed solution to reinstate the kinds of discussions that fans' originally revelled in was met favourably by all in the thread, but by this point it was too late. Tensions between fans were already high, and unbeknownst to them at

the time, Schneider had already posted his last comment at the GS and was to delete his account two days after this reclamation was instigated.

Intra-Fandom, Fragmentation, and iWankarly

Between June and August in the summer of 2009, internecine fighting over ships became particularly heated and divisive. Fan comments suggest that entire threads were deleted because of the 'wank' (several specific threads were mentioned by fans that no longer appear in the archives), GS moderators (now four) introduced new rules (until this point the only, and "most important rule" had been "play nice and don't be lame" [**GS3**, 19/3/09]), and overall activity had severely declined. In August, **GS5** (2/8/09) explained why they had all but "dropped off the face of fandom" by the summer:

> It had, at that point, become completely NOT about the show itself and entirely about the inner-workings of the *fandom*, which, as we've been seeing, is sort of deconstructing itself these past couple of months.

GS5 also suggested that the "bashing, the obsessive behaviors, the pure *entitlement*, the flat out wank" had greatly contributed to their reduction in fandom involvement. For the most part, it was the behaviour of Seddie shippers that were identified as the most disruptive and since there were few decidedly supportive 'Seddiers' in the GS pre-Schneider, it is logical to assume that it was 'newbies' who were considered obsessed, disruptive, and entitled.

In the new environment of the GS, divisions were drawn between existing members attempting to keep the peace, and 'newbies' (presumably mainly originating from Twitter) intent on proving their ship. Intra-fandom dismissals operated on distinctions related to age and fan experience, but also codes of conduct and perceived level of investment. While original members had initially characterised their community, and/or themselves as 'crazy'—drawing on and repurposing various negative stereotypes associated with the fangirl to convey their fan status (to Schneider) and gain symbolic capital (thus to some extent, reinscribing these discourses with positive values)—such terms shifted in meaning, if not in intent, when they came to be applied to 'newbies'. While older members were "crazy" and fannish *enough* to recognise and (playfully) claim the term for themselves, new fans were considered *too* (negatively)

'crazy', and too entitled to recognise or even label their 'crazy'. 'Newbie' fans failed to label their performances, and became Others from whom to 'disidentify', thus figuring lower in the internal fangirl hierarchy.

To that end, a small group of GS fans defected and created iWankarly (Figure 2.7)[75] in September 2009, an LJ community that would allow fans to "talk about the show in a completely uncensored way" (**GS37** in IW, 22/9/09), to express their misgivings, or as it was, to mock GS members and the discussions taking place there. Most likely *not* coincidentally, iWankarly was opened the same day GS moderators announced that posts would be subject to pre-approval and threads more heavily monitored. By this point, Schneider had disappeared from LJ so it was not a response to his continued surveillance, but clearly a defection from the GS community and an attempt to find some respite from the supposedly antagonistic, overly serious, and 'too invested' fangirls.
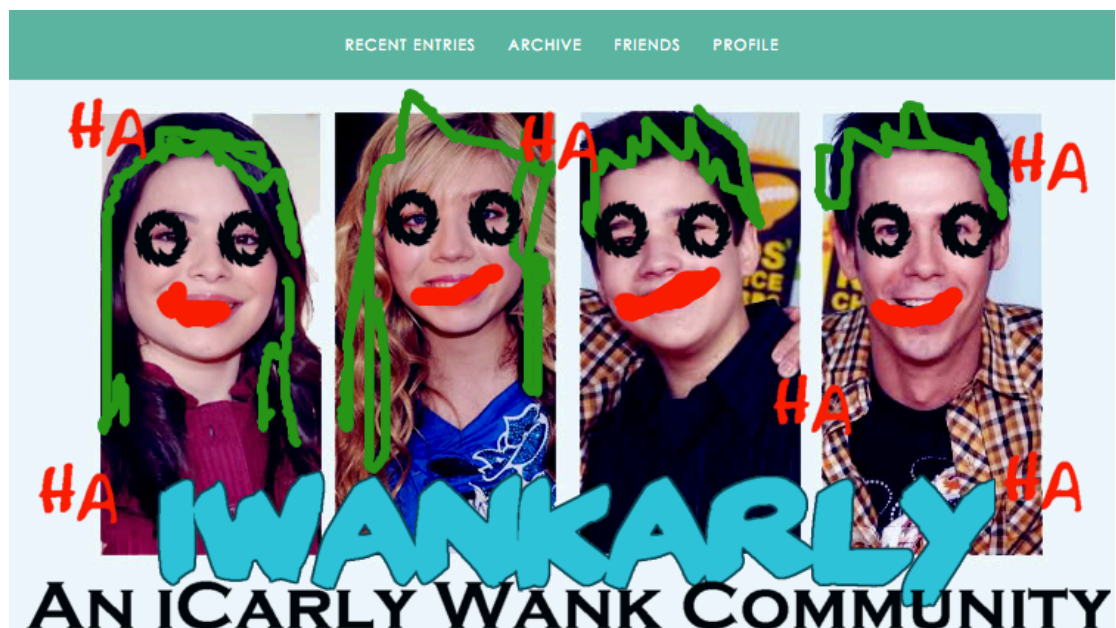
Figure 2.7: iWankarly header

At the GS 'wank' was "totally untolerated" (ibid), whereas iWankarly was "All Wank. All Drama". The definitions of wank in the two communities appear crucially different however. According to the founder of iWankarly, their breaking point was a shipping argument at the GS, or a " big wankfest over what color to give the ship of

[75] Several other communities were formed, although their primary occupation was not to mock or instigate wank about the GS.

Creddie… It was retarded. I didn't know--or care really--that ships were being given colors. All hell broke loose because of the post" (ibid). In this sense 'wank' referred to an online argument. With the creation of iWankarly, which directly parodied the GS, their primary targets were members of the GS, exposing the 'wank' that occurred there, mocking it, and potentially instigating more. According to Zubernis and Larsen (2012) implicated in much fandom wank is the policing of other fans, with moderators as 'big name fans' (BNFs) the frequent targets. Indeed, the moderators of the GS were targeted in the discussions at iWankarly, in particular for imposing restrictions on fan discourse, hence the indication that this was a new space within which to speak candidly. Posts were not made anonymously but individual fans were not often singled out (by name) as a target of attack or bullying (Figure 2.8). Most 'mean' comments were aimed more generally at the community as a whole, usually focusing on discourses related to shipping.

Figure 2.8: iWankarly rules

Zubernis and Larsen argue that identifying an enemy can be an integral part of the functioning of a group and developing group cohesion (123). Sometimes it is an external enemy, such as the network or TPTB, and sometimes an enemy is identified by creating an out-group within fandom. In the case of *iCarly* LJ fandom, Schneider was certainly identified as an enemy of sorts, but it was the younger or less

experienced shipping fangirls, in both the GS and on Twitter, that were most often identified as the main source of contention by iWankarly and original GS members.

When Schneider left the GS, despite his claims that he moved to Blogspot for "better control", and to better connect with a wider variety of fans, GS fans (in the GS and iWankarly) had their own theories. Although discussions differed in tone between the two spaces, the conclusions and implications were the same; it was the fault of over-invested, entitled fangirl shippers—not 'us' but 'them'. Several fans considered Schneider's statement to be a "sugarcoated" version of the truth: a " lot nicer than YOU BITCHES BE CRAZY" (**GS18**, in **IW** 28/9/09). There were also mixed reactions to the implications of Schneider's involvement in and departure from fandom. While **GS38** (3/9/09) claimed "it is not Dan's responsibility to coddle shippers and make sure that what he posts is shipper proof", **GS33** (3/9/09) suggested that he should be "more careful", having been "in fandom for so long makes it obvious that he knows about ships and how rabid shippers can be, why would he upset his fans like this??". Recognising the age discrepancy between fans and the tween show, **GS39** (in **IW** 28/9/09) also suggested his departure was a wise decision: "At the end of the day this is a children's show, and professionally, it's an absolutely good idea for him to put some distance between himself and crazy, porn-writing fangirls." In any case, the fans that may have instigated the departure were characterised according to negative fangirl stereotypes; as infantile needing "coddling", as overly obsessive, emotional, and "rabid", and they were pathologised and sexualised as "crazy porn-writing fangirls". While the GS continued after Schneider's departure, as did iWankarly for a shorter time, *iCarly*'s LJ fandom never recovered. It seems there was a great deal of residual negativity, if not resentment, as **GS40** (in **IW**, 8/2/10) summed up: "I've never actually liked Dan Schneider as a person since he joined the fandom and brought in all the crazies".

The last update to iWankarly was in March 2010, over two years before the GS's last discussion post in November 2012, although posts were infrequent from early 2010. Six months before *iCarly*'s finale, **GS41** (27/5/11) declared *iCarly* was "dead" to them, while **GS2** (28/5/11) stated that for them, "fandom activity" was dead. Fan endings were thus "subjectively asserted" (Whiteman and Metivier 2013, 291). Similar to Joanne Metivier's (2003) account, there was no formal announcement of

the end of the GS, but a subtle and incomplete ending to the community. Although a final episode discussion post was opened, only six fans and one moderator returned, with more praise for the only one active moderator than for the episode itself: fans had "checked out a long time ago" (**GS42** 24/11/12). Whiteman and Metivier (2013) note that official endings are "not experienced by all communities in the same way" (292) and in the GS, it passed with virtually no comment by almost all its members. In contrast, for Tumblr fans examined in Chapter Four, it was a marked occasion, both a celebration of their fandom experience and a lamentation for *iCarly*'s ending.

Conclusion: Fangirl Spectrum or Hierarchy?

Sandvoss (2005) conceptualises fandom as a form of Heimat, a place of "emotional significance" (64) that can be called 'home'. Sandvoss argues that many different fans identify "a sense of security and stability" (ibid) in reference to their fandom which can be associated with Heimat. Yet, "Heimat also always involves an evaluation and categorisation of others… [implying] a sharp division between 'us' and 'them' in the form of a constructed 'Other'" (ibid, 64-5). The Groovy Smoothie (GS) began as a small community of mostly already-acquainted fans. Close friendships and relationships were made or strengthened (these were stated or implied in various threads in the archive) and in this way, it is likely it felt akin to home for these fans. The notion of Heimat seems applicable to the GS and appropriate to draw on here in summing up the discussions of inter- and intra-fandom distinctions and divisions in this chapter. Initially, the Heimat constructed an 'Other' *outside* the borders of LJ (inter-fandom); Twitter fans were constructed as a negative Other and TV.com fans as a 'lacking' Other, the former as *too* young, loud, crazy, and girly, the latter as *less* "wacky", experienced, authentic, or fannish. Both Others were "constructed and imagined" (ibid, 65) as lower in some way in an internal fangirl hierarchy—either 'too' fangirl or not 'enough' fangirl—and were thus Others from whom to 'disidentify'.

Sandvoss goes on to argue that the Heimat is "fiercely guarded, to the degree that the imagined Other functions only as negative point of collective identification" (ibid). The GS had no control with regards to Schneider's introduction, nor the 'newbies' or 'interlopers' that followed, but the new fans became the Other, and the "negative point

of collective identification" for the GS fans that left for iWankarly. Of course, as Sandvoss suggests, those with a particularly "harmonious image of Heimat, as something necessarily stable and unchanging, are particularly likely to be hostile to newcomers—who are held to be the cause of all manner of disorienting forms of 'change'" (65). Hostility towards the newcomers was largely contained, deflected outwards to Twitter fans as unnamed Others, until canon-ship wars came to dominate message threads and iWankarly was set up to mock GS fans. By this point, the moderators rarely posted and original members had pulled back significantly, so hostility does appear to have been largely directed at 'newbies'.

As this chapter has illustrated, "hierarchies and distinctions continue to perform crucial functions within contemporary fan cultures" (Williams 2013, 327) even within the same space. Indeed, theories of distinction complicate notions of unity in community, and instead highlight the ways in which fandom operates as a social hierarchy whereby fans compete over knowledges and status (Hills 2002). In the GS, hierarchies were formed and distinctions made, based on a variety of axes, but most notably perceptions of age, fannish experience/activities, nature/depth of investment, and affect. Although they were all fans of the same object, divisions were also drawn according to, across, and between fan spaces, as well as 'codes of conduct' (usually linked to fan space) and notions of authenticity, coming to form a fangirl hierarchy. Indeed, it may even be better imagined as a spectrum, one operating across and between the dual-definition of 'fangirl', since the boundaries seem exceptionally fluid and unstable according to which group is drawing on fangirl stereotypes, from whom they are distinguishing themselves, in what context, for what purpose, and across which axes.

While gender was not as much an explicitly potent discourse as it might be, and often is (particularly in teen oriented fandoms),[76] gender and age discrimination was implicated within, and cut across most—if not all—lines of division, with the fangirl label either explicitly used or strongly invoked, neatly comprising a gender and age dismissal. The rhetorical strategies and pathologising language used to mark such distinctions revealed the extent to which they can be understood as constructed around

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[76] See: Click (2009); Bode (2010); Hills (2012); Nash and Lahti (1999); Williams (2013).

the fangirl stereotype and notions of 'fangirl as pathology'. As precisely young and female, or at least thought to display characteristics mocked as young and 'feminine', the figure of the fangirl, if not at the very bottom of a fan hierarchy,[77] is likely not very far off. Rather than simply accepting their low position, GS fangirls created further lines of division within their own 'level', by replicating and redefining negative cultural constructions of the fangirl. Most likely aware of their already culturally devalued status, and as fans of a show targeted to a distinctly gendered/generational demographic no less, distinctions may have been more urgent in this context, particularly in the presence of the producer. To perform age and gender, in a sense to fulfill the stereotype that demotes them, was only to demote them further, and thus behaviour was policed stringently and criticised within the terms of 'fangirl as pathology', creating a fangirl hierarchy/spectrum cutting across several *iCarly* fan spaces.

This case study suggests that when claimed for the self, 'fangirl' functioned differently than when invoked in its most derogatory sense for Others, as a means to distinguish, discredit, and exclude. With the dual-usage of the term, it was acceptable as an older or more experienced fan to label a performance as 'fangirl'. To knowingly claim/label a 'fangirl' performance was to demonstrate one's belonging and value in the community, and hence status or capital, as well as to protect against outside judgement. There is a sense in which those that claimed the term 'fangirl' for themselves were doing so in a highly conscious, performative manner *precisely* in order to create a distinction from unaware, unlabelled, and/or disruptive fangirls. When the Other fangirl was an imagined Other, *outside* the community, GS fans could claim both 'crazy' and 'fangirl' to perform and signify their fan status, elevating them as more fannish but not problematically 'fangirl'.

When fangirls from other spaces came into view, or were brought into their space, disidentification from the Other fangirl was more crucial. Since they were being referred to as 'crazy' in a negative sense, the term could no longer be used tongue-in-cheek as it once was to poke fun at their own investment. Accordingly, the meanings, connotations, and value of 'fangirl' shifted when applied or invoked in relation to

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[77] See: Busse (2013).

those distilling the negative definition and whose performances were not self-aware or labeled by the performer. Fan performances left unmarked meant to be at risk of disparagement. Accordingly, pathologising language, initially a marker of fannishness, modified in relation to the self when used negatively for others. These rhetorical strategies thus reveal a complex set of negotiations in terms, whereby one is 'crazy' *enough* and fan *enough* to label their performance as 'crazy fangirl' (or variations on the diction), but must not be *too* 'crazy' that they cannot label their performance, or too invested, antagonistic, and 'entitled' that others may negatively apply the term for them.

Chapter Three:

Disciplining *iCarly* Fangirls: Gendered Fan Representations, 'Hierarchy of Pathology', and Stigmatisation

While challenging stigmatised media representation of fans was a central project in the first wave of fan studies (Jenkins 1992; Jensen 1992; Lewis 1992a; 1992b), in recent scholarship this has been somewhat replaced by a "critical utopianism" (Scott 2011, ix) that celebrates the 'normalisation' and mainstreaming of fan identities in popular culture (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Gray et al. 2007; Jenkins 2006c[2002]; 2006e; Sandvoss 2005). Conversely, Matt Hills (2005a) suggests, "academic narratives of negative fan stereotyping being superseded by normalized or 'mainstreamed' fan identities may be somewhat premature or overly optimistic" (40). Rather than newly empowered, or universally normative or "hegemonic" (ibid), some fans continue to be pathologised within contemporary culture, even within fannish texts. Moreover, as Suzanne Scott (2011) argues, not only do these categories of pathologised and normative "continue to exist in a state of contradictory co-existence, but [they] are increasingly inscribed along gender lines" (282). These discourses can be seen most distinctly in fan representations (Hills 2005a; 2012), and to focus on these may shed some light on fans' "shifting cultural capital" (Scott, ibid). As this chapter illustrates, in the context of an analysis of *iCarly* fans' 'in-text' representation, it may also highlight the relative *stagnation* of fangirl cultural capital, and the continued potency of the pathological fangirl stereotype.

Considering that negative stereotypes are used by non-fans and fans alike, there have been surprisingly few studies that have considered representations of fans in popular fannish texts (Stanfill 2013),[78] and even fewer that have documented, analysed, or theorised fan responses (Schmidt 2010). Lisa Schmidt (2010) and Laura Felschow (2010) both make valuable contributions to this area. Yet, while they both account for fan responses and the 'meta-episode' in question, neither performs a sustained and integrated analysis of text and reader. In this chapter I contribute to work in this critical but largely overlooked area as I analyse the ways in which *iCarly* represented its fans in the text and examine how fans responded to it. However, rather than

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[78] Shows that have featured character stand-ins for their fans include, *Supernatural, Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. See: Felschow (2010); Johnson (2007); Ross (2008); Schmidt (2010); Scott (2011).

analyse the episode and its construction of fans in isolation from fan reception, I integrate text and reader by undertaking a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011: see Chapter One). In doing so, I focus on aspects of the text that were most discussed by fans, and thus implied as most important (or contestable) in their experience/reception. I then further build on work in this area by adopting a triangulated approach to consider the producer's responses to fan criticism and the strategies at play in his interactions with fans, with a view to explore the implications of his defence/explanation in the context of fan comments and intra-fandom dynamics.

Introducing iSAFW

The *iCarly* episode I focus on, 'iStart a Fan War' (iSAFW) (4.6-7) distills long-standing fan stereotypes and "mocking representative tropes" (Stanfill 2013, 120), almost exclusively represented as female and notably referred to within the text as "super-psycho". The gendered and pathologised fan stereotypes that iSAFW relies upon are a focal point of the episode analysis, and equally a focal point in fan and producer discourse surrounding it

iSAFW follows the iCarly trio as they come face to face with the especially fervent fans of their webshow at 'Webicon', a ComicCon-esque convention for webshows and other online-based entertainment. There, the iCarlies discover that fans are most concerned with speculating about their potentially romantic entanglements, and as they attempt to deny the existence of any ship or pairing between them, a 'fan war' ensues between Creddie and Seddie shippers. The webstars explain to their fans that iCarly is about comedy not about romance, and shipping is not something they should get too "caught up" on, but to no avail: the fan war continues. In their speech, the iCarlies construct a 'hierarchy of pathology', whereby fans are categorised along a spectrum from "normal" to "super-psycho" according to their level of investment. In *iCarly* fandom, this speech was widely considered to be *Schneider's* invalidation of their fan activities and shaming of their fannish identities, expressed via the characters. Accordingly, a number of fans sought to express their outrage, defended their culture and pleasures in the text, and proclaimed their right to read the text as they please, according to their own desires.

In response to fans' negative reactions to the episode, Schneider posted an explanation on his Blogspot (BS) site, and further reiterated the 'hierarchy of pathology'. Believing "they have the right to not only state their opinion but to aim those opinions at people with positions of power in the entertainment world" (Ballinger 2014, 3.3), 329 fan comments were posted to Blogspot in response. Of the comments available to view at the time of my research (see Chapter One), approximately 3-4% openly challenged or criticised Schneider, and/or the fan representation specifically. However, this figure is not representative. Comments posted immediately after the episode aired that were deemed "too" negative, or that directly or openly criticised the episode, were admittedly (by Schneider) deleted by website admins. Although positive comments, those that affirmed Schneider and/or iSAFW, are included in this chapter to more accurately represent a range of responses, I am more concerned with fans' negotiations and criticisms of the text as they sought to defend and legitimise their fan identities and activities. To compensate for the deleted comments in the producerly space, and to explore how fans responded to the episode in a less restricted space beyond the control of the producer, I also include critical comments from those posted in the Groovy Smoothie's (GS) episode discussion post.

Fan/Producer Relationships

The gathering of fans and producer in one space, the deleting of comments on Blogspot, and the dismissal of fans/activities in iSAFW clearly point to issues of power in fan/producer relationships that demand some consideration here. Jenkins (2006b[1995]) observes that "the relationship between readers, institutions, and text is not fixed but fluid. That relationship changes over time, constantly shifting in relation to the ever-changing balance of power between these competing forces" (112). In the age of digital fandom, boundaries between producers and fans have steadily blurred. Not only are audiences 'invited in' (Johnson 2007b) as co-creators, with the industry harnessing fan creativity and user-generated content (Martens 2011), but the presence of showrunners on social networks has opened up the communication channels between them and fans (Ballinger 2014; Bennett 2014; Zubernis & Larsen 2012). Yet, while fans and producers may have been brought closer together, their status is not equalised (Marwick & boyd 2011) and there still exists a tenuous and perhaps fraught

relationship (Hadas and Shifman 2013; Milner 2010; Postigo 2008; Shefrin 2004; Soukup 2006; Williams 2010).

Conflicts between fans and producers have a long and varied history, often coalescing around disputes regarding fan activity, and in particular, the invalidating of activities or interpretations that fall outside the producers interests (Jenkins 1992; Johnson 2007a). Just as fans are more visible online, so too are their practices, and in the context of the erosion of the so-called fourth wall, they are arguably more vulnerable to producers dismissing or mocking their fannish practices, pleasures, and identities. Rather than direct invalidation, producers now come armed with knowledge by monitoring fandom online, and fans may thus find themselves and their practices represented, and indirectly invalidated, within the story world they are so invested in. For Felschow (2010), representing fans in-text, in any way producers see fit, enables them to "[wrest] some control back to the side of production" (6.6). Just as fans are encouraged to believe they have increased influence in the digital environment (Williams 2010), their cultural power is denied via representations that they are powerless to affect (Felschow 2010).[79] Moreover, if fans complain about their representations, producers can choose not to listen, and in the case of negative/stereotypical representations, hold dissenting voices up as 'evidence' of unruly fans that cannot be tamed, thus validating their representation and disciplinary strategy.

Following Felschow, and drawing on the work of Derek Johnson (2007a), here I consider iSAFW as a disciplinary strategy and examine the fraught relationship and power relations between *iCarly* fangirls and Schneider in the context of the producer's marginalisation of their fannish pleasures in the text. Before analysing the episode in the second section of the chapter, I first examine Schneider's construction of persona and 'authenticity' in order to contextualise the interactions and power relations between him and fans, and consider how this can be seen to influence how they understand and articulate themselves as fans when they respond to him on Blogspot.

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[79] Conversely, Hadas and Shifman (2013) discuss the various ways in which fans perceive and negotiate their own power, even disempowering themselves, as they seek to reestablish the fan/producer divide.

Having analysed the episode, in the final section of the chapter, I examine fans' responses in light of iSAFW as disciplinary strategy, exploring how this was affirmed, resisted, or replicated by fans. I then introduce and analyse Schneider's blog post and his use of pathologising distinctions repeated from the episode. In this context, I draw on Criminologist John Braithwaite's (1989) theory of 'reintegrative shaming' (RST). This theory, not otherwise used (to my knowledge) in published fan scholarship works to account for the dynamics between the producer as 'shamer', fans as 'shamed', and the ways that fans position themselves (as reintegrated), and others (as alienated) in response. Here I also draw on Erving Goffman's (1963) theories on stigma in order to theorise the difficulties in challenging the pathologisation of fangirls *as* fangirls.

Highlighting the need to study girls outside the resistance/conformist framework, I propose that the fangirl stereotype can be understood to suppress/oppress fangirls in two ways. Firstly, the stereotype itself makes it difficult to (initially) challenge their construction, and secondly, when a direct challenge is launched, the stereotype is taken up again to silence and dismiss them. In either case, I suggest that fangirls' challenges (or the scarcity of them) to the dominant stereotype should be understood within the context of their disempowerment/stigmatisation, rather than necessarily considered evidence of passivity or complicity in their own marginalisation.

Dan Schneider's Blogspot: A 'Producerly' Space for Fans?

Textuality and Functionality of Blogspot

As outlined in the previous chapter, Schneider began to cultivate a prominent online presence during the early days of *iCarly*, moving across and between a variety of different websites and social networking platforms. In a bid to keep up with new technologies and of course his fans, Schneider joined Twitter in March 2009, and Facebook in September 2009—the same month he transferred his LJ archive to Blogspot. While LJ facilitated a range of fan activities, including the sharing of fan works, fans only posted comments on Blogspot; although they could post links to their fanworks, official spaces are not commonly used to 'expose' fan works, or at least not without controversy.

Blogspot is a blog-publishing service hosted by Google which allows for integration across other social networks (Facebook, Twitter, and Google+) and instant messaging services (Yahoo, Aim, Netlog, and OpenID). Although Blogspot is not a social networking platform, its integration capabilities arguably alter the dynamic of the online space in terms of perceptions of public and private. That is, fans commenting on Blogspot often used their 'real life' names rather than pseudonyms, or commented while logged-in via personal, relatively open Facebook or Twitter accounts. This could also be understood as a reflection of the level of personal engagement fans' may have wished to have with Schneider. With integration functionality, the website is open to a wider audience; it is not necessary to have a Blogspot account to comment on the website if logged-in on another platform. Furthermore, if logged-in on a compatible network, the integration enables users to find each other and connect elsewhere, thereby fostering a (potential) sense of community which is not otherwise a prominent feature of the website.[80] Comments are displayed chronologically by default, but can be re-ordered according to rating or most recent. There is a reply function for each comment, enabling users to respond directly to individual posts, although this was not frequently used even when succeeding comments appeared to be direct replies. For the most part, comments posted were directed at Schneider; the primary function of the website being to interact with him, rather than fans communicating with each other.

The blog itself has a relatively minimalist design concept with a white background and a simple header (Figure 3.1).[81] Schneider's online name, Danwarp, which he uses across all internet platforms, is prominently displayed and digital connectivity is highlighted via a full signal Wi-Fi logo.

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[80] Since beginning my research, the comment function on the site has been entirely removed and fans can no longer post to the site. The archives of comments are also no longer visible.
[81] The website was redesigned in 2014; here I describe the original design as it was during my research period.

Figure 3.1: Dan Warp's Blogspot header.

In the header, Blogspot is clearly defined as the "Official website of Dan Schneider" and Schneider is introduced as "Maker of TV, Movies, & Fine Ointments". 'Ointment' does not refer to anything specific; it is a word favoured by Schneider and often used in his sitcoms for comedy purposes. The logo of Schneider's production company, 'Schneider's Bakery' is prominently displayed, and beside the logo is a reminder of his Twitter handle.

To the right of the page is a sidebar: "stuff you should click on" with various links and opportunities to interact (Figure 3.2). "iAnswer YOUR questions" links to an internal page on which there is a list of 15 select questions and answers that have been re-posted from his Twitter followers. Schneider advises fans to pose their questions to him on Twitter and to tag them '#AskDanWarp' so he can easily find them. The "best" ones are then answered and reposted on Blogspot. Thus, Twitter was often used to aggregate fan questions and to redirect fans back to the blog to read the answers, thereby also ensuring clicks. The other links include: "The Slap" (the Schneiderverse version of Facebook), details of the most effective ways to make contact with Schneider and links to his other social media accounts, "Hungry Girl" (the food and dieting website of Lisa Lillien, Schneider's wife) and, "Moody's Point: What Happened ?!?" (a recurring sketch segment in Schneider's earlier show, *The Amanda Show* [1999-2002]). The final section in the sidebar also includes the "Blog Archive" (dating from 2001).

STUFF U SHOULD CLICK ON
iAnswer YOUR Questions
FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)
The Slap
Contact Dan Schneider
DanWarp's YouTube Channel
DanWarp's Twitter (Follow It!)
iCarly.com
Hungry Girl
Moody's Point: What Happened?!?

Figure 3.2: Blogspot sidebar.

Below the links is "DanWarp's Fan Box" (Figure 3.3) which is an embedded Facebook widget. This houses a link to the site (thereby prompting further engagement on the social network), a 'like' button to follow the page, a display of Schneider's most recent status updates, a box displaying the number of people who have liked the page, and a selection of ten profile pictures of those following the page. If a user is signed in to Facebook while on Blogspot, this selection of profile pictures includes any Facebook friends of the user who have also 'liked' DanWarp, thereby prompting connectivity between one's Facebook friends with the same interest.

Figure 3.3: Fan Box.

The most popular blog posts on the website were Schneider's "Fun Facts". These entries offered details about how individual episodes came to be (how and why the idea was born), behind-the-scenes information (e.g. meanings behind particular lines of dialogue), hints about small details to look out for (e.g. hidden meanings and objects on the set), notes on script changes, and stories from the day of shooting. Other frequent topics for the blog posts included: ratings news (how *iCarly* performed against other shows in its age demographic or time category), requests for fans' creative input such as voting for which shots to include in new opening credit sequences, and promotions for upcoming episodes ("Fun Facts" also functioned as promo). The promotional posts were often followed-up with separate episode discussion posts, although most fan comments were posted on the "Fun Facts" entries.

Schneider also posted answers to questions related to the show's production which he utilised as an opportunity to teach his fans about television history. For example, he explained how and why laugh tracks are used, the difference between multi-camera and one-camera shows, as well as sharing his thoughts on the shortening/absence of TV theme songs. Schneider often referred to classic sitcoms as he claimed they inspired him in the making of *iCarly* and that, as a TV producer, he wished to uphold their traditions. 'Educational' posts such as these worked to position Schneider as the authoritative creator and 'voice of reason'. The posts were also written in a way that placed Schneider in the role of experienced educator and assumed that fans were much younger than they often claimed they were; the teaching style appeared to be aimed at children and young people, and the content assumed the reader had only very basic knowledge of television, and even less familiarity with older sitcoms. This approach, and the role he assumed, was in stark contrast to the way in which he positioned himself as a naïve fandom 'newbie' at the GS, which in turn encouraged fans to teach him about fandom. Before turning to the analysis of iSAFW and fan discourse surrounding it, in the following section it is necessary to explore further the roles or strategies performed by the producer in interactions with fans, in order to illustrate the ways in which the performance of an 'authentic' self can be seen to effect fans' treatment of him in response.

Schneider Online: The Presentation and Construction of an Online Self

As much scholarship has acknowledged, the relationship between the star or TPTB and the audience is no longer unidirectional but increasingly reciprocal. Celebrities and showrunners can communicate en mass, most popularly via Twitter, with their fans and followers. Across several disciplines, scholars have sought ways in which to theorise these interactions and the performance of the self within these spaces (Bennett 2011; Ellcessor 2009; 2012; Jenkins 2009; Marshall 2006; Marwick & boyd 2011; Mutean & Petersen 2009; Petersen 2009). In this section I consider the performance of a 'social front' (Goffman 1959), theories of 'performative intimacy' (Marwick & boyd 2011), and the construction of an 'authentic self' in relation to Schneider and his interactions with *iCarly* fans. This is in order to examine the ways in which both his persona and the presentation of Blogspot as 'authentic' can be seen to shape and influence fans' interactions with him. In turn, this will work to frame the later analyses of both Schneider's post that seemingly intended to justify the episode, and fans' comments posted in response.

Much of the literature dealing with the online persona performed by a celebrity or famous person draws on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman. While Goffman never wrote about the internet or social media in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), the concepts used in his work are widely appropriated/cited when discussing online personae. In a discussion of the creator of *Babylon 5*, Kurt Lancaster (2001) argues that any discussion of a public figure must begin by acknowledging that the persona, as evidenced in websites and online interactions with fans, involves a social performance, regardless of whether they or the fans are aware of it. Lancaster draws on Goffman's work to refer to this performance as a 'social front'; one which serves to influence other people to think and act in a certain way, or at least, which defines the occasion to encourage people to think of them in the way they wish them to. Much like the way an actor performs a role, people project a 'social front' that is constructed as 'authentic', when in essence, those performing in this mode are attempting to "control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of [them]" (Goffman 1959, 15).

Across each of the social networks Schneider occupies, he enacts a 'social front' as that of a TV producer more concerned with his fans than that of the stereotypical

"arrogant Hollywood producer" more interested in money and his own success; what Lancaster refers to as "the 'average Joe' social front" (4). As part of this consistent performance, Schneider claims that each of his accounts are genuine and any posts are authored by himself personally, although in the iSAFW post he does admit to having a team of admins that help run Blogspot. Rather than undermine his claims of 'authenticity', this admission only seems to highlight the amount of work involved in sustaining an online presence, which for some fans, is experienced as a privilege that they express gratitude for. Throughout this chapter I refer to Schneider as though it is truly 'him' blogging, for this claim and supposedly 'authentic' performance shapes the ways in which fans respond (e.g. the use of direct address), and sets the tone for their expressions to him (e.g. adoration, appreciation, deference). Indeed, only one comment in the iSAFW post questioned Schneider's level of interaction with fans: "you're never going to actually read this comment, but I'll reply anyway, haha." (**BS1**, 2010).[82] Thus, regardless of the truth behind Schneider's claims of authorship/authenticity, fans mostly accepted it as such.

Arguably, it was in Schneider's interest to address, and attempt to manage fans' negative responses to the episode. The 'social front' performed in the post concerning iSAFW, and by writing the post itself, can be seen as an attempt to control the conduct of fans; functioning to appease critical fans or invalidate their opinions, and position himself as a producer that cares enough to explain (or justify) his work. As a seemingly supportive gesture it would perhaps lessen fan negativity and absolve him for the contentious representation of fans. Furthermore, to "placate" (**GS43**, 22/11/10) fans, after being accused of ship teasing, Schneider could assure them in the post that something "HUGE" was going to be happening soon.

The ways in which a producer addresses, or is perceived to address fans, can affect fans' responses back to the producer, for instance, R.M. Milner (2010) notes that when producers are perceived as supportive, fans post deferential/respectful responses. Conversely, when producers are seen as contemptuous they are often met with antagonistic/adversarial interaction in return. Thus, the presentation of self, and in turn the treatment of fans and the status that producers offer them, is immensely

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[82] All Blogspot fan quotes cited in this chapter are dated only 2010 (see Chapter One) and are not indicated further. However, GS fan quotes are cited in full.

consequential; how it occurs can affect fan perceptions of importance and esteem (Soukup 2006). Building on this, and drawing on theories of reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite 1989) later in the chapter, I consider in more detail fans' perceptions of the producers' supportive or contemptuous treatment of fandom and how this shapes their responses in return. Accordingly**,** I argue that the way(s) the producer approaches fans also has implications for the ways in which fans treat and respond to each other. Suffice it to say here, that for fans that experienced the episode, and by extension Schneider, as contemptuous of fans/fandom practices, their responses were particularly adversarial, with some even effectively denouncing their loyalty to Schneider, such as **BS2** who wrote: "I no longer believe in you, Dan. Not anymore". Some fans even halted their activities, which, as **BS3** explained, had consequences for *iCarly* fandom more broadly. Speaking about two popular 'big name fans' who created YouTube videos of their reviews/speculation but denounced their fandom after iSAFW*,* **BS3** wrote:

> When IStartAFanWar [*sic*] came on and went by, they felt so sad and they quit their reveiws [*sic*]. They reveiwed [*sic*] all Seddie Stuff. They even made a song and everything. They were so excited and then you dissapointed [*sic*] them. I was so sad. They said they would not make Speculations or Reviews again until something really Seddie came up.

For the majority of fans commenting on Blogspot, although they were initially upset by the episode, Schneider's explanation/justification/defence effectively appeased them, overturning their previous indignation and appearing to instigate feelings of being supported by the producer. However, as these two examples illustrate, while the "reciprocal influence and potential for near instant feedback can foster communication and understanding, it can also lead to a perceived 'us vs. them' dynamic to the interaction with definite consequences to the status-relationship between the two parties" (Milner 2010, 727-8). This 'us vs. them' dynamic is predicated on power relations, and issues of cultural power are central to an understanding of the online persona and the way in which it seeks to balance and manage the distribution or perception of power.

One of the ways in which cultural power is seemingly democratised is through what Alice Marwick & danah boyd (2011) term 'performative intimacy' (148). Again, drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors, they explore how celebrity is

practiced on Twitter through the appearance and performance of 'backstage access'. Although I would not necessarily define Schneider as a celebrity, the producer can be understood to be engaging in practices of 'performative intimacy' as part of the "ongoing maintenance of a fanbase… authenticity and access, and the construction of a consumable persona" (Marwick and boyd 2011, 140). Content posted on Blogspot (such as that in the "Fun Facts" entries) symbolically offers fans 'backstage access', and Blogspot itself is set up as Schneider's personal blog (created for the purpose of interacting with fans), thus offering a sense of intimacy with his 'authentic' self. Furthermore, the intertextual circulation of a celebrity's image via a more immediate and intimate connection with audiences via social media (despite having millions of followers) promises the revelation of the 'authentic self' (Bennett 2011), and as I have outlined, Schneider was seemingly accessible to fans across a range of platforms. 'Performative intimacy' is, however, exactly that—performative. It is considered a purposeful and strategic performance (Bennett 2011), and the construction, illusion, *promise* of 'authenticity' as part of the enacted 'social front' may work to (attempt to) control and manage fans (Dare-Edwards 2014a). Specifically, it is "maintained through mutual recognition of power differentials by fan and practitioner" (Marwick and boyd 2011, 140). Performative intimacy is therefore likely to be especially visible/mobilised during moments of dispute or heightened tension. Schneider's presence and consistently performed 'social front' across various online platforms can be understood within terms of 'performative intimacy'. Yet, the post addressing issues with iSAFW in particular, appears to function precisely as a strategic performance that simultaneously aimed to preserve his persona as a TV producer concerned with his fanbase, and sought to manage fan feedback; to contain, mollify, overturn, and even silence the negative responses that were evident within *iCarly* fandom. Crucially, any negative responses would need to be managed before they were in danger of influencing the fans that were comparatively more positive. In the following section I consider fan responses to the deletion of their critical comments and the ways in which fan(girl) stereotypes became implicated in the policing/silencing of critical fans.

Silencing Fangirls: Deleted Comments and the Right to Criticise

Denouncing sole control of Blogspot, Schneider explained in the iSAFW post that admins moderate fan comments on his behalf. In response to complaints that fan

comments were deleted from the iSAFW post Schneider (2010)[83] also claimed that he personally never deletes fan comments "because they are critical". This statement also reflects Schneider's claims when he first began posting at the Groovy Smoothie (GS), that all opinions are welcome and valid, even if they are negative—claims which fans later argued conflicted with his behaviour (see Chapter Two). Since DanWarp appears at the end of every episode of the shows he makes, and the blog shares the same name, Schneider admitted there are rules even he has to follow and he was forced to agree for his blog to be "supervised". In this way then, Schneider denies he has ultimate control over his blog, and hence over fans. Nevertheless, compared to LiveJournal, Blogspot offers increased control and a more structured and controlled form of participation. Indeed, official sites "have agendas and advantages different in kind from those created by viewers" (Ross 2008, 18), and the control of, or complete silencing/deletion of negative fan responses in this case, can be understood as one of the advantages of Schneider directing fans from Twitter to Blogspot, and himself moving from LiveJournal to Blogspot.

Because, according to Schneider, the admins claim so many children visit the site, they demand it must remain "nice, clean and fun" and therefore any comments that may inspire "controversy, fighting, or negativity" must be deleted accordingly. In the post Schneider appeared at great pains to highlight that he initially had to fight for the comments section to be included on his blog (the people in charge didn't want it as it creates a lot of extra work), but he did so because *he* wanted the channel of communication open on both sides. Stating that he fought for fans' right to have a space in which to interact with him and each other, it is thus implied that fans should not exploit this 'privileged' space that Schneider had personally requested for them. While he states that "every person has the right to be negative, argue or even be mean", Schneider requests that those who wish to behave in such a way to create their own blog away from the "kid-friendly" site that he wishes to maintain. Therefore, although Schneider claims that fans have the right to criticise, negativity is not welcome on his Blogspot—as though negativity/critique is not appropriate for younger

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[83] Unless indicated otherwise, all Schneider quotes cited in the rest of this chapter are from the iSAFW post: Schneider, Dan. 2010. "To Any iCarly Fan Who Was Upset By 'iStart A Fan War'". *Danwarp,* 21 November. http://danwarp.blogspot.co.uk/2001/11/to-any-icarly-fan-who-didnt-like-istart.html. [Accessed 10/7/12].

audiences, even if it is expressed in a calm and appropriate manner. In the comments, **BS4** explained:

> I'm still disappointed about the fact that they deleted the negative feedback, because they didn't contain bad words or anything that children couldn't read, it was just criticism, and they did not lead to a fight, in fact, quite the opposite.

Claiming to have seen the negative feedback before it was deleted, **BS4** argued it *was* child-friendly and that there is not anything inherently age-inappropriate about fan criticism, thus suggesting that both Schneider's explanation and the deleting of comments were seen as unjustified. Although **BS4** did not elaborate what the opposite was to instigating a fight, it is implied that negative criticism united fans together; a sentiment which is expressed more explicitly in the GS as **GS44** (28/11/10) exclaimed: "lol I actually think he brought all his fans together for the sake of being upset with this episode". Thus, while shame works counter to a sense of solidarity (see Chapter Two), criticism of the source text—even while the text is understood to shame them as it was with iSAFW—can unite fans.

Given that shame is particularly prevalent among female fans, amidst the dismissal of fangirl modes of fandom, it is thus notable that fan criticism has been linked to gender. Jenkins (1992) argues criticism is the "institutionalization of feminine reading practices" (116). It also links closely to community and fans relative powerlessness over the source text. Although fans are unable to direct the ultimate development of their TV shows (Felschow 2010; Williams 2010), they still retain the right to protest, and often do so loudly. Jenkins continues, "the forcefulness with which fans express and defend these criticisms is rooted in the shared understandings of the fan community… stem[ing] not from personal tastes alone but from the critical consensus of fandom" (118-119). In the past, fans organised letter-writing campaigns, while today fans mobilise online to express their dissatisfaction; "In such cases, the social dimension of meaning production becomes the basis for collective action against the corporate executives or program producers who exercise such control over program content" (Jenkins 1992, 119).

Fans' protestation over iSAFW was largely related to the lack of development in, or resolution of, their respective ships. At the time of iSAFW, ships and their meanings

were largely produced within fandom spaces[84] as they were not (yet—although heavily teased) canon relationships, and thus when iSAFW failed to deliver, and dismissed shipping itself, fans complained, buffered by their sense of consensus within fandom. In fact, fans of the two conflicting ships were equally disappointed with the episode, and thus the sense of unity formed by mutual upset can even be understood to cross ship divisions within *iCarly* fandom. With the mutual sense that Schneider was mocking and dismissing their pleasures, and attempting to control fan activities, a minority of fans[85] with differing interests sought to defend and legitimise their fannish pleasures/practices in the face of their devaluation. Fan comments that directly challenged Schneider and appeared resistant to his attempts to control and curtail fan pursuits will be explored in more detail in the final section of this chapter. While disunion in terms of fan policing and stigmatisation will also be explored in the final section of this chapter, divisions between fans also emerged in this context as they did not all agree criticism was justified, appropriate, or even fannish.

A number of fans sought to protect Schneider from criticism and highlighted all the reasons why he should be only praised. Ironically then, just as a minority articulated their frustration for having their comments deleted, several fans attempted to further silence them, for instance, **BS5** commented:

> umm sooo sorry to say this but seriously after he apoligized [*sic*] you guys are STILL explaining why you were mad at the show and why you are disappointed are you guys really doing that to him i [*sic*] pretty positive he has a lot of stress already and you guys are just adding on to it!!! im [*sic*] even getting stressed out and i [*sic*] dont [*sic*] get why you people could be so rude to him after everything he has done umm without him THERE WOULD BE NO ICARLY so BACKOFF!!!!!!!!! [*sic*].

Clearly, **BS5** considered fans' criticisms or expressions of disapproval to be invalid since Schneider apologised and/or justified the episode. The comment also elucidates the extent to which some fans deferred to the producer in the event of his explanation for the controversial episode. For this reason, it seems that in some cases Schneider's apology functioned to minimise or shut down critiques, with quite a number of BS

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[84] Which is not to say that individual audience members or fans that do not participate in fandom cannot ship or make similar meanings.

[85] It appears to be a minority on Blogspot, likely because negative comments were deleted. It may also be the case that many with negative opinions did not direct their criticism to Schneider; my sense from researching fan responses to the episode across multiple platforms is that the majority of fans were upset, disappointed, or otherwise critical.

fans jumping in to protect him from further criticism and correcting negative fans (that they characterised as ungrateful) in his defence.

Conversely, a few fans argued Schneider did not need to be "shielded", from "opinionated" (**BS6**), fans since "A healthy dose of constructive criticism doesn't hurt anyone" (**BS7**). Moreover, claiming their "moral right" (Jenkins 1992, 87) to criticise, many of those with negative opinions—particularly GS fans—argued that critiquing does not diminish their fandom, but is instead evidence of how *much* they care. Jenkins (1992) suggests that criticism and active opposition to the producer's interests can be an essential part of fandom (122), and that their emotional investment justifies their critical stance (88).[86] **BS8** justified their criticism similarly: "We're not negative because we hate Schneider's shows; we're negative because we love them, and we want them to be even better". The collective "we" **BS8** spoke of also "reflects the strength that comes from expressing not simply an individual opinion (though fans would insist on their individual rights to complain) but the consensus of the fan community" (Jenkins 1992, 88).

The right to critique and the content of fans' complaints were double-edged in this context. Fans' central pleasures in *iCarly* were, for the most part, located in their investment in the characters and their relationships—a pleasure that, as I will illustrate, was dismissed, and undermined within iSAFW. Accordingly, critical fans then complained about the episode's lack of "relationship development" (**BS9**), the sense that it "shut the door to either [Seddie or Creddie]" (**BS10**), and its failure to arrive at any conclusion: "we call this ship teasing" (**BS11**). When their critical comments were deleted, fans complained once more, claiming that their voices deserved to be heard, and defending their right to criticise since their opinions were not of an inappropriate tone for the website (thus invalidating Schneider's 'excuse'). Although, as **BS12** noted, "considering how volatile this episode could become for the fan base, it really gets to be a fine line where the criticism ends and the emotional outbursts begin", **GS45** (20/11/10), speaking in the GS, was adamant that Schneider "shouldn't have done an episode like that unless he was prepared for an actual discussion". Therefore, not only did the deleted comments prevent discussion but, in **GS45**'s view,

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[86]See also: Gray (2010); Hadas and Shifman (2013).

"ignoring actual, intellectual discussion by deleting the blog post just further[ed] the lack of understanding between the show's staff and the fanbase".

Although fans of any age and/or gender may be dismissed by the TPTB in a similar moment of conflict as this, widely held assumptions about girl fans, informed by the cultural construction/stereotype of the fangirl, can be understood to be operating in this context or, more specifically, functioning to silence them before they have a chance to be heard. If the fangirl stereotype effectively holds that one is irrational, 'hysterical', shallow/vapid, and hence unintelligent, then accordingly their opinions would likely be written-off—presumed to be unimportant, ill-informed, and emotionally (not rationally) driven. If fangirls' opinions are presumed not worth listening to, they likely won't be heard; in turn however, this means that challenging the fangirl stereotype *as* fangirls is particularly challenging when denied the opportunity to counter it. In a sense, criticising or complaining to TPTB (regardless of 'validity' or 'rationality') inadvertently feeds into the stereotype of excess emotion and over-investment. Accordingly, comments of this nature are perhaps more likely to be overlooked, if not shut down (i.e. the deleted comments) and considered disruptive, if not entirely unjustified (i.e. supposedly of an inappropriate nature for the 'child-friendly' Blogspot). This scenario is also of course, both feeding into and a reflection of patriarchal society in which women are systematically taught that their opinions do not matter and that they have less of a voice than men. In this context, girl fans are perhaps less likely to speak out, not just as fangirls (and because of fangirl stereotypes), but as young women. Not being heard then, if they do speak out—which some do—may only reinforce the fallacy that their opinions do not matter. In light of this cycle then, it is possible to understand the manner in which girl fans may be seen to "buy into their own devaluation" (Stanfill 2013, 121) and internalise "misogynist external discourses of female fans, and of women and girls, in general" (Herrmann 2008, 101).

GS45 (20/11/10) criticised Schneider for ignoring "actual intellectual discussion" and appearing unwilling to engage in actual discussion about fans representation in the episode (as though it was beyond reproach). However, it seems that Schneider failed to see certain discussions, given that he apparently had to ask the admins about the

content of the deleted comments.[87] Nor did he appear to engage with comments at all to see how fans were responding, not least if they were holding informed and thoughtful discussions.[88] Clouded by the stereotypical assumption and fallacious belief that fangirls simply do not have anything worthwhile to listen to, fan comments may have been pre-judged as trivial and hence not read or deleted. In this way, the fangirl stereotype would have already silenced them before they can speak (or be heard), and functions to only silence them further when they do. I will return to this argument later in the chapter, but for now, I turn to an analysis of the episode in question to explore in detail what it was that fans found especially contentious.

Through a reader-guided textual analysis of iSAFW, in what follows I am concerned with examining the extent to which the representation of fangirls continues to rely on negative and pathologising stereotypes, the ways in which *iCarly* fans negotiate these stereotypes, and their defence and legitimisation strategies in response.

Fan Parodies and Gender: A Reader Guided Textual Analysis

The 'Hysterical Crowd' and the Gendering of *iCarly* Shippers

In 'Fandom as Pathology', Joli Jensen (1992) distinguishes between two pathologising representations of fans—'the obsessed individual' and 'the hysterical crowd'—both of which are represented or referred to in iSAFW, and almost exclusively presented as female. At the beginning of the episode, when the iCarlies announce their attendance at Webicon during their webshow, they make reference to the fact that they didn't make it last year because a "maniac" captured them, tried to kill Gibby, and locked them in her basement. Although they proceed to invite fans to come along, they also make it clear that this invitation is only open to "normal" fans that won't kidnap them. This is a nod to an earlier episode 'iPsycho' (3.18-19) in which they meet obsessed fangirl, Nora: a lonely, socially awkward misfit, complete with a pet chicken and a propensity to vomit when excited. Believing that the iCarlies are angels sent from heaven to change her life, Nora distills many of the pathologising attributes that Jensen describes in her work: the blurring of the line between fantasy and reality,

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[87] In his post, Schneider shared screenshots of his email reports and explained that when he was informed about the increase in negative comments he had to ask what the negative comments were saying.
[88] At least, Schneider did not engage with comments by replying to fans in the iSAFW thread.

fandom as a chronic attempt to compensate for a lack of social inclusion, and "individual obsessions, privately elaborated" (13). This fan stereotype is not always gendered female, although the deviant, pathological fans presented in *iCarly* are exclusively female. For **BS13** the consistently negative representation of fans throughout *iCarly* is used to invalidate the opinions of those who were upset by iSAFW specifically:

> People need to lighten up and know that there have always been jokes about crazy fans with no lives (Nevel, Nora, Mandy, to name a few…) and just because this one was pointing out the SHIPPERS particularly, its still no reason to take it personally (**BS13**).

In **BS13**'s opinion, the fan representation in iSAFW was simply one of many, rather than an isolated event, and was no more negative than those that came before it; if not expected in light of the series' history, it was certainly not to be taken personally. In contrast, for **BS14,** the numerous fan parodies added together were taken to show that Schneider's humour was cruel: "I think your humor can be unnessesarily [*sic*] mean-spirited at times (be kind to the lonely girl and you will wind up trapped in her basement)*"*. In this example then, previous representations of the 'obsessed individual' in the series intensified criticism for iSAFW.

To return to the episode then, despite their bad experience with an 'obsessed individual', the iCarlies make their way to the convention. Seemingly unaware of the extent of their popularity, they are surprised to discover they have their own conference hall when they arrive. They are immediately warned by an organiser to be careful of the "dangerous" fans that begin screaming as soon as they notice the webstars' presence—a signifier of uncontrollable female fandom in public spaces (Ehrenreich et al. 1992). Naïvely, Freddie approaches them, but is soon grabbed and pulled over the barricades into the mob of fans (Figure 3.4-3.5). Although there are male fans in the crowd, it is predominantly female, and it is arguable that the fanboys are feminised for their performance of affect and fangirling in this manner.

Figure 3.4: Freddie and fans.

Figure 3.5: Freddie pulled into crowd of fans.

As the (self-proclaimed) strongest of the group it is left to Sam to rescue Freddie from the predatory fangirls, launching herself into the group, and moments later dragging Freddie out by his feet (Figure 3.6). Concerned about his wellbeing, Carly asks if he is ok since, "those girls almost tore you pieces"—a reference to their animalistic and rabid (sexual) voracity. Gradually, it dawns on Freddie, "I know" he says, clearly enjoying the girls' attention and beaming from ear-to-ear, before jumping back in to the admiring group of girls. Representing Jensen's 'hysterical crowd', the mob of fans display a distinct lack of control, mauling the object of their affection.

Figure 3.6: Sam rescuing Freddie from fans.

The action then cuts to the *iCarly* conference hall which is packed-full of fans and divided in two sections across the room between the two conflicting ships. Once more, the fans are not exclusively female, but the males in the audience are quite overtly coded as camp or effeminate (for instance, Craig and Eric from *Drake and Josh* who appear in the episode were widely thought to be coded as a gay couple),[89] or they are stereotypically overweight, desexualised, and unkempt. A number of the male fans in the audience are also markedly older than the majority of the teen aged audience. Mel Stanfill (2013) notes that if fans are not literally represented as teenage, they are constructed as being "arrested there in their development; anyone who is a fan is of dubious maturity" (124).[90] Accordingly, these older male fans are infantalised by their fannishness and function as comedic figures.

Despite the age and gender variation in the audience, all of the questions posed to the webstars come from girls in the audience, and all but one are relationship orientated. As shipping is focused on romance, and one of the dominant tropes of fangirls characterises them as sexually needy, overly obsessed, and emotional (Larsen and Zubernis 2012; Zubernis and Larsen 2012), the representation and choice of characters here can be seen to perpetuate this gendered stereotype. Before enquiring

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[89] See: EverydayHeterosexism. 2014. "Drake and Josh and Craig and Eric", 7 September. http://everydayheterosexism.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/drake-and-josh-and-craig-and-eric.html. [Accessed 28/2/15].
[90] See also: Cline (1992); Driscoll (2006); Jenkins (1992); Johnson (2007a); Lewis (1992a; 1992b).

about Sam's remote control, the first fangirl to ask a question proudly confesses to have watched every episode of the webshow, thus laying claim to their status of fan and the depth of their investment (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Fan dressed in pink.

Further evidencing the depth of her investment, she claims to have counted 93 different sounds in total across all the webisodes, and yet has identified that the control only has 6 buttons. This could be considered as an example of fans' "cultivation of worthless knowledge" (Jenkins 1992, 10), as well as a display of fannish investment. While Sam and Carly both look distinctly unimpressed, perhaps even confused by the question (Figure 3.8), Freddie explains how he designed the control, prompting the crowd to sigh in collective relief.

Figure 3.8: Sam and Carly unimpressed at Webicon.

The second girl, with a large bow in her hair and a speech impediment, stands up and announces herself as a Creddie shipper (Figure 3.9). On the other side of the room, this immediately prompts an overweight fanboy, wearing a bright yellow t-shirt with SEDDIE written in large black letters across the front, to jump up, punch the air, and shout "Seddie" in retaliation (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.9: 'Hairbow'.

Figure 3.10: Seddie fanboy.

The crowd erupts as they loudly begin chanting the name of their respective ships. A chairman swiftly intervenes and directs "Hairbow" to continue. None of the fans featured are given names but are instead referred to by, and reduced to, their physical attributes or objects that they are wearing; of these, 'Hairbow' is a distinctly feminised nickname. By not assigning these fictional fans' names, they become reductive, transferable properties. Hills (2012) argues that leaving fans unnamed renders them merely "representative or indicative", although they "are not pathologized in this semiotic move… they are nonetheless systematically denied the selfhood… and their position as secondary is thus tacitly and ideologically reinforced" (117). In iSAFW, fans that pose questions are not only denied the selfhood to be known by their actual names, but are reduced to, and stereotyped according to, their gender.

Hungry for backstage gossip, Hairbow demands of Carly and Freddie: "what are the circumstances surrounding your romantic relationship. Details please". Carly denies she and Freddie are in a romantic relationship, but unconvinced Hairbow states: "I respectfully disagree". She literally will not take "no" for an answer, much like some fans online (to other fans' frustration) rally for proof of their ship, regardless of what may be occurring in canon. Convinced of her interpretation of the text/dynamic between the two webstars, Hairbow is presented as deluded, entitled, invasive, and incapable of knowing the difference between fantasy and reality—accusations often hurled at fangirls.

Moving on, the next girl stands up holding a gigantic PearPad (Figure 3.11), and agreeing with Hairbow she shares: "as you can see, I've taken screen grabs of actual iCarly webisodes which prove that Carly and Freddie do like each other". In lieu of Carly admitting to a romance between her and Freddie, this fan turns to the text itself to prove that their ship is real and their line of inquiry is valid.

Figure 3.11: 'PearPad girl'.

This is a representation of a typical fan activity within the (real) *iCarly* fandom whereby fans create and exchange images (still and in GIF form) from episodes to 'prove' their ship (see Chapter Four). "PearPad girl" describes two of her images: "here's where Freddie touches Carly's shoulder, and this one, Carly, look at the way you're staring into Freddie's eyes". Fan art of this kind often depicts very brief or subtle moments between characters that are taken out of context or may go unnoticed by audiences who are not watching with 'ship goggles' in order to find evidence for their ship. Decontextualised in this way, fans of opposing ships, and indeed the producers, can easily deny such 'proof'. Accordingly, Carly denies its significance, while also shaming Freddie with her revelation: "well yes, because he had a tiny little pimple on his nose" in order to explain their closeness.

Several fans on Blogspot commented on this representation of fannish practices. **BS15** admitted to their membership in a fan community and uploading fan art in an attempt

to prove their fandom, yet maintained distance from the negative portrayal of fans in the episode, qualifying their admission with the statement: "but I know I have other things that are more important than iCarly." While claiming a particularly invested kind of fan status, they were also careful to avoid being seen as 'too' invested, thus indicating a hierarchy of (appropriate) fannish investment. **BS16**, on the other hand stated: "I like the crazy 'screenshots' proving freddie [*sic*] and carly's [*sic*] love. haha. people really are that crazy, and i [*sic*] loved the parody". Not only were they careful to make clear they do not engage in such activity by referring to "other people", they also reaffirmed the pathological fan stereotype by stating that both the fan activity, and the fans that engage in it, are "crazy". Although more explicitly announcing they are '*not* that kind of person', **BS6** nevertheless defended fans who *are* that invested in the characters' relationships:

> Thiis [*sic*] episode was clearly targeted toward those fans who are interested in development of the characters romantic subplot, a subplot which has been featured and centralised in previous episodes. Now I'm not the kind of person who screen caps every little glance any of the characters give each other, but with episodes liek [*sic*] iKiss etc this has been the central plot. You've focused on both Sam and Freddie and Carly and Freddie in previous episodes. It seems like a cheap shot to admonish the fans about "obsessing" over the romantic relationships, when you are the one who fostered it in the first place (**BS6**).

Although somewhat distancing themselves from especially invested shippers, **BS6** defended fans' pleasures and interests, and indicates that shippers have been directly encouraged by Schneider and are therefore not seeing something that is not there (as they potentially do in their screen caps). Rather, romance has been a central plot in certain episodes and thus fans "obsessing" over romance is unsurprising and as such, it is unfair to admonish them for their investment. This is a similar move to that seen demonstrated by fans in the GS (Chapter Two) in their justification of their focus on subtext and innuendo; it was obviously 'in' the text, and they were therefore not (sexually) deviant to celebrate/remark on such content in a tween show.

In a telling display of the level of detail with which a fan may watch the show, and is accordingly mocked in this scene, **BS17** noticed an error in the representation of this fan practice, and did not appear ashamed to point it out:

> Question though: […] the scene where the Pear pad girl was showing screen caps of actual icarly [*sic*] webisodes looked like a mistake. How could she

have gotten a screen cap of Carly looking into Freddie's eyes when we can clearly see Freddie holding the camera? Am I the only one who saw this? (**BS17**).

It is somewhat ironic then that the parody in iSAFW mocks fans for paying too close attention (both PearPad girl and remote control girl), yet a Blogspot fan, **BS17,** notices that the representation of this particular practice—one which is based precisely on *being* precise and noticing minute details—is in fact inaccurate. Their query whether other fans had noticed, could be considered a desire for approval/assurance or, on the other hand, a claim for status or distinction; only they had noticed and were thus the most discerning fan posting in the comments.

To return to the episode, following PearPad girl, Sam then directs the next question to "Man-boobs in the back there" (Figure 3.12), a character that very clearly distils a popular, yet problematic, stereotype of fanboys as outlined by Jenkins (1992)—at once feminised (a male with breasts) and desexualised (over-weight, unkempt). In this instance, the mocking condescension and feminisation of this character is furthered by his status as a very invested shipper (wearing a Creddie T-shirt), as he publicly and unashamedly declares that he agrees with the two girls (PearPad and Hairbow); Carly and Freddie are "clearly in love".

Figure 3.12: "Man-boobs".

As the audience erupts, clapping and cheering loudly (Figure 3.13), Freddie notices Adam's (Carly's potential boyfriend) pained expression and denies the romance—but to no avail. Carly then attempts to quell the accusations but Sam, playing the role of ship-teaser, interrupts and confirms that Carly and Freddie are "deeply in love". Carly is furious as Adam leaves the room, but Sam is unperturbed, just having fun playing with the crowd. Later, Sam retrieves Adam in an attempt to make it up to Carly, although in true unconventional Sam fashion, she ties him up in an extension cord and drags him back into the room against his will.

Figure 3.13: Cheering fans.

Sam admits to the crowd she was messing with them and didn't mean what she said about Carly and Freddie. One male in the audience moans: "she pulled our collective legs", while another concludes: "so, if he's not dating Carly, he must be dating Sam". At this, the Seddiers begin chanting "Seddie for the Win", a moment which for **BS18**, solidified their opinion that "the representation of the superfans [was] for the most part […] dead on. Right down to the 'Seddie FTW' line that I too often see in these forums". At the same time, in unison, the Webicon fans raise their Seddie paddles, which Sam openly mocks. **BS19** reads meaning into the shape of these paddles (Figure 3.14), considering them to be a potential hint about ships: "seddie paddles are hearts, where as [sic] the creddie is a cricle [sic], and hearts brake [sic], but circles go on forever". **BS19** therefore appears to have read into a textual element of the episode

in the same way as represented by PearPad girl, scrutinising the text for any clues that may support their investment, and hope/belief in their ship preferences.

Figure 3.14: Seddie and Creddie paddles.

"A Nerd Riot Can Last For Days": The Return of "Get a Life" and Policing Fan Investment

As fans in the audience continue battling over their ships in the wake of Sam's comment, events swiftly get out of hand, as they become physically aggressive and a stool comes hurtling towards Carly. The chairman blames Sam for the fan war and urges her to stop it because the "crowd is packed with nerds." As a self-confessed nerd himself, Freddie questions this comment and the chairman replies: "don't you understand? A nerd riot can last for days. Many of these people don't have lives or jobs to get back to." Almost thirty years after the *Saturday Night Live* (1986) sketch in which William Shatner notoriously told fans "to get a life",[91] it seems the fan stereotype of the social misfit, whose 'obsession' with a TV show forecloses any other form of social life, perseveres.

Unsurprisingly, this apparent judgement about fans' investment and their construction as lonely, unsociable people was especially contentious and considered insulting by many *iCarly* fans. For **BS20**, although they claimed that they were, if not a neutral

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[91] See: Jenkins (1992, 9-12).

shipper, then a Cam shipper, they were nevertheless "a bit offended on behalf of [their] fellow shippers" and explained in their comment that it was because of this part of the script that *other* fans were insulted. Thus, although they distance themselves from the fans, or "nerds" that this comment was aimed at, they still appear to have felt sufficiently affected by it in order to comment on it. For **BS21**, it was the "only" thing that they were offended by, but it seems, on a more personal level related to their age:

> *clears throat* I have a life, and I go to school (which is as close to a job as a thirteen-year-old can get), and *all* the people I know, whether they watch iCarly or not, have lives, and most have jobs or school. I guess that was intended as a joke, but I really didn't find that very funny… :/ (**BS21**).

While **BS21** acknowledged that the conference organiser's sentiment was most likely intended to be a joke, they clearly didn't find it amusing. In fact, they defended themselves, and their friends—whether *iCarly* fans or not—against the accusation that they have no lives and that, even if they have no job, school can equally be considered one. It is interesting then, that while they state their age, and could very well dismiss the sentiment as not applicable to them (they are quite unlikely to be in legal employment at the age of thirteen), they still deem it essential to refute the accusation that fandom precludes any life outside their investment.

Sandvoss (2005) notes of fans and their privileging of their fannish object over personal relationships, that it is not about fandom rendering them unable to build relationships, but is instead "illustrative of the degree to which their object of fandom functions as an extension of self and is constitutive of their identity" (100). In the same vein, I do not wish to imply here that **BS22** claimed to have no life, yet they nevertheless explained that they reorganised their schedule especially so that they would have "available one hour to sit and see this "SPECIAL" episode". That the episode was, as they describe: "really below my expectatives [*sic*] and pretty disappointing", meant that their effort to watch the episode as it aired was even more infuriating and felt like "a WASTED HOUR" that they could not get back. From this it could be concluded that the broadcast of iSAFW was considered "appointment TV' (Freeman and Lessiter 2003), and therefore, to find the episode "insulting" (**BS22**) or "offensive to the super fans" (**BS4**) after having made an effort to watch it, was then even further insulting, as well as disappointing.

'Author Filibuster': In-text Advice from the iCarlies, Correcting Fan Readings and 'Moral Ownership'

Along with the insinuation that *iCarly* fans are nerds with no lives, it was the iCarlies' message, and the way it was delivered, that most of the directly negative comments, and many of the indirectly (couched) comments, were concerned with. An 'author filibuster' is "where the plot stops dead in its tracks to give the author an opportunity to preach their message to the readers or audience, often very political or ethical in nature".[92] This message delivered by the *iCarly* characters was widely considered a "non-moral" (ibid) example of an author filibuster, as many fans were quick to point out that it appeared as though Schneider had 'employed' the characters to deliver his own message through them. This in turn, was considered "upsetting" and taken to be "directly" patronising (**BS11**). First, I will return to the episode analysis, as the perpetuation of fan stereotypes and the policing of fan behaviour was most evident in this scene, and then I will attend to fan responses to the iCarlies' controversial speech. This will illustrate the various ways in which fans defended their investment and interests in *iCarly*, and challenged or resisted Schneider's attempt to curtail fan activities.

As the mob of fans continues fighting, it is not until Sam lets off two flares that they finally gain the attention of the crowd. Then the iCarly trio delivers the all-important message widely considered to be a direct warning from Schneider to fans. Since fan criticism was heavily focused on this scene—for it clearly pathologises fans in its language and dismisses fans' pleasures in the romantic aspects of the show—it is worth quoting it in its entirety in order to fully present the nuances.

> **Carly**: Ok, moving on. We have some things to say
> **Sam**: We love *all* fans of iCarly
> **Freddie**: Totally
> **Carly**: The average fans
> **Sam**: The superfans
> **Carly**: The psycho fans
> **Freddie**: Even the super psycho fans
> [points to Hairbow and Pear Pad girl]
> **Carly**: But, iCarly's not really about our romantic relationships
> **Sam**: I mean sure, we're better than average looking teenagers with "those" feelings (rolls eyes)

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[92] TV Tropes. n.d. "Author Filibuster". http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/AuthorFilibuster. [Accessed 3/3/15].

Carly: But, iCarly's about comedy, stupid pointless comedy just to make people smile and laugh
Sam: And sometimes groan.
Carly: I know the whole "who should date who thing" is fun to think about
Freddie: But don't get too caught up in that stuff you know
Carly: Sometimes you should just watch iCarly, laugh and share an apple with a friend.
[Seddie boy hands an apple to Creddie girl]
Freddie: Or any fruit really
Carly: Honestly, I'm not dating anyone right now and the only guy I wanna be dating is sitting right there, tied up with an extension cord
Man-boobs: Ah, now I get it… this guy [pointing to Adam] took Carly away from Freddie
Hairbow: Freddie killer!!!
Man-boobs: Let's get this guy
[the crowd start attacking Adam]
Carly: How can I just leave Adam like that?
Sam: He belongs to them now
Freddie: Yeah, poor Adam, lets go

There are several issues that fans picked up on from this speech. Before I turn to fan comments on this aspect of the episode, I wish to make note of some preliminary observations of this scene. Firstly, the categorisations of "average", "super fan", "psycho fan", and "super psycho fan" will be discussed in more detail in the final section of the chapter. It is worth noting here however, that Freddie points to Hairbow and PearPad girl as he refers to "super psycho fans", thereby indicating that fangirl shippers are considered the most extreme in this 'hierarchy of pathology'. Secondly, although Carly acknowledges, and seems to appreciate, that shipping is fun, Freddie eagerly points out that fans should not become too "caught up" or too invested in this aspect of the show. This was taken by some BS fans to mean that Freddie (and/or Schneider) was specifically "judging us for likeing [*sic*] your show too much" **(BS23),** and insinuating that fans should just watch passively and laugh at the "stupid pointless comedy", i.e. not become too involved. Thirdly, the interruption of Man-boobs is also significant, as he can be seen to represent both the fan that won't listen to the TPTB—Carly is unable to even finish her speech—and also, the 'dangerous' or invasive fan that not only instigates a fan war, but also incites other fans to attack the character that has the potential to 'sink' a particular ship, represented here by love-interest Adam. In the remainder of this section of the chapter I examine fan responses to this part of the episode, specifically considering the ways in which fans claimed that it was a message sent directly from Schneider to shame their investment and fannishness, and how they

negotiated this perceived attempt to correct their ways of watching, engaging, and enjoying the series. Defending their interests, fans also spoke to the fact that their desires for character relationships were a reflection of their growing maturity/stage of life, and wishing to more closely relate to the characters in the context of their own lived experience as young people.

In response to the filibuster, **BS24** addressed Schneider directly:

> I wanted to say that I could really picture you taking Carly's place when she was telling everyone that iCarly isn't about relationships, it's about comedy (stupid, pointless comedy.) I hope most iCarly fans will take your—I mean Carly's advice on just looking at iCarly as a whole.

Here **BS24** strongly hints they believed the sentiments expressed by the iCarlies were based on Schneider's own opinion of fans, and that it was easily imagined as Schneider speaking directly to the fans. **BS25** even went so far as to suggest that it felt as though Carly was "possessed". In other words, it was not only obvious that Schneider covertly used his characters to deliver a message but they also considered it out of character for Carly to make this statement:

> it kind of felt a little weird to me you would use an entire episode to make a speech to say what most fans already know....you probably could have just said something on twitter to get your message out, because most people who are crazy about fanships follow you and check it at least once a week if not daily… you went about it a little weirdly/creepily/not very conventional way....by speaking through carly, it kind of made me feel like she was possessed or something (: (**BS25**).

For **BS25**, it was not only considered "weird", "creepy" or 'unconventional' for Schneider to speak through Carly, but to dedicate a whole episode to express an opinion that most fans did not even need to hear was also considered pointless. They also suggested the message could have been expressed via a different medium. It is very likely however, that regardless of the medium, any instruction from Schneider on this matter would have attracted a similar (negative) reaction. Furthermore, it is arguable that such a statement would have been greatly at odds with Schneider's online persona, or performed 'social front' as described earlier in the chapter. If indeed the message espoused by the *iCarly* trio *was* Schneider's direct message to fans, having the characters deliver it would seem to somewhat distance him as author

(although he is credited as sole writer of this episode), and thus from blame. This strategy did not, however, absolve him from blame, nor did it fully protect his constructed 'social front' as a producer that privileges his fans. Rather, a number of fans rallied against the idea that Schneider was seeking to control how they read and interpreted the text, with claims such as: "I'm going to keep shipping as intensely as I damn well please" (**GS46**, 21/11/10).

With the perception that Schneider was attempting to instruct them how best to read the show and correct their readings, some fans retaliated and claimed a 'moral ownership' of the text. Marking a distinction from legal ownership,[93] Harrington and Bielby (1995) define 'moral ownership' as the sense that some fans have that their communities and the characters themselves are 'theirs', instead of belonging to TPTB. Although this sense of ownership is not new, with Jenkins (1992) noting this of fans in the pre-internet era, a number of scholars have argued that "fandom's paradigm of collective ownership" (Murray 2004, 19) has intensified in convergence culture (Brooker 2002; 2001; Harrington 2013; Ross 2008). In light of **GS47**'s (25/11/10) comment it could also be considered a generational shift as they exclaimed: "Dan needs to realize that people (ESPECIALLY a younger audience) are going to consume his media how THEY want to. And he can't make them change" (original emphasis). **GS47** didn't elaborate on this assertion, but it does present a notable contrast to the casting of young people as vulnerable to the media, and those least likely to engage in resistant reading practices. It could also be related back to internet-era fandom, insofar as a younger generation have grown up with the internet, and thus the heightened sense of (shared) ownership may relate to an internet-age mentality[94] as much as a generational mentality. It may be that the discourses of 'entitlement' applied most keenly to Twitter fans perceived as younger/inexperienced by GS fans (see Chapter Two) also intersect here.

Illustrating a sense of moral ownership over the characters, and equally denying Schneider's "pretentious" (**GS47**) attempt to control how fans view his work, **GS14**

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[93] See: Brooker (2002); Guschwan (2012); Jenkins (2006e); McCulloch et al. (2013); Murray (2004); Sandvoss (2005).
[94] As a co-option of the "community rhetoric of early 1990s cyberculture", the so-called 'true spirit of the internet' directly links to notions of ownership and inclusion, and specifically, offering fans the sense that they are insiders and have a stake in the property (Murray 2004, 19).

(21/11/10) stated: "I just have a problem with Dan creating these dynamic, awesome characters and then trying to tell us what kinds of fans we should be with them". Similarly **GS48** (20/11/10) also argued that iSAFW was made worse because Schneider "took characters that people love and care about and used them as a way to lecture fans". Fans sense of ownership over 'their' characters is illustrative of fans' identification practices and fandom as "an integral part and extension of the fan's self (Sandvoss 2005, 101)—an aspect of fandom I consider in more detail in Chapter Three. Inviting characters into one's life, as "living, growing people" is what makes fandom so "rewarding" (Gray 2010, 14-15), and the sharing within fan communities works to increase the sense that they belong to fandom, rather than to the TPTB. The use of beloved characters to "lecture" fans in this way, as though employing them to do Schneider's 'dirty work', was thus experienced by some as even more of a betrayal. Moreover, **GS14** and several others in the GS appeared to resent Schneider's perceived supervision of what "kinds" of fans they should be; or in other words, what kinds of ways they should, or should not, engage with the characters. In this case, Schneider's 'good' fan was to refrain from hoping for, or imagining characters in, romantic relationships. Since shipping was a hugely important, and divisive part of *iCarly* fandom, it was however, also integral to how many fans understood themselves as fans, whether articulated as an individual or as part of a wider community.

Defending (and Silencing) Shippers and Generational Identification with *iCarly*

For some critical fans, the iCarlies' speech was understood specifically as Schneider's failure or refusal to understand fans and their pleasures in, and desires for, the show. In this context, **GS49** (20/11/10) explained fan desires' in terms of their age and growing up with the series:

> The point Dan and Nickelodeon seem to fail to understand is that there is such intense feelings about shipping because people really care about these characters. Many have grown up with them, and just as they have matured, they want the iCarly gang to mature as well. I don't think that the average fan wants just random, meaningless episodes with the characters acting silly anymore. They want continuity and character development, even if it means sacrificing some of the comedy.

GS49's comment indicates that fans' desires and their shipping of the characters is not merely arbitrary, but has specific reasons behind it. *Contra* Schneider, it is not fans

reading the text 'wrong', but rather reflective of their relating to the show in the context of their own lives and experiences growing up alongside the characters. In other words, they are not simply fangirls dreaming about romance (according to stereotype), but their demand for romance narratives is driven by a desire to identify with the show; to have it reflect their own experiences as young, but maturing people. Indeed, it is suggested that fans have already matured beyond what *iCarly* is offering, and the show (and the characters) ought to, or should be permitted to, grow up with them. For **BS6**, to avoid this part of growing up is "unrealistic" and Schneider is "cheapening it by insisting that it doesn't exist in [his] world".

Echoing **GS49** (20/11/10), **BS10** suggested that without developed relationships—the very aspect of *iCarly* that keeps them "coming back for more":

> tension in the show will just dissipate and leave nothing but cheap gags and middle/high school dramas with characters we don't really know or care about [...] All I ask of you and Nickelodeon is to let me still have fun pondering the what-ifs, instead of closing the door to them (**BS10**).

As each of the chapters in this thesis make clear, "Instead of seeing characters as mere components of narrative" (Booth 2012, 310), most *iCarly* fans were primarily concerned with character development and character relationships. As fan comments here, and those I discuss in the next chapter suggest, their investment in romantic plotlines was not necessarily, or at least not exclusively, a gendered preference for romance genres,[95] but also particularly related to age and lived experience. For example, **BS26**, a male identified fan, explained that while it is understandable that Schneider may want to "keep it light hearted and minimize the baggage that comes with all of the relationship drama" (as a show targeted to younger viewers), the characters are "maturing; experiencing those transitory teen years that includes relationships". Claiming that it is these themes that drew so many to *iCarly* in the first place, **BS26** suggests that plenty of fans "would find a sanitized iCarly, with no mention of relationships at all, very unappealing".

In the same context, **GS45** (20/11/10), argued that fans' reasons for shipping were misunderstood and 'inaccurately' represented:

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[95] See: Reznik and Lemish (2011).

yeah, shipping can get out of hand and people do need to relax about it all, but most shippers just do it for fun. They had no conclusion beyond Carly's lil' speech. None of the fans were enlightened about it, they just showed a bunch of obsessives fighting each other. It could have been done a LOT better. All they really had to do to make it less of an insult is add a few characters that shipped, but weren't crazy with it. Have them discuss why they liked a certain pairing, with the obsessives still going crazy. It would have added so much to the episode, and not left so many of the fanbase alienated (**GS45**).

Just as *iCarly* was accused of failing to depict teenage experiences realistically (or at all), iSAFW was found inadequate in its depiction of its fans and their pleasures in the show. Rather than attempting to understand fans' reasons for, and pleasures in shipping, or offering a varied, nuanced representation, **GS45** suggested iSAFW represented them as a homogeneous, pathological mass and mocked them indiscriminately. Presented with an opportunity to better represent fans, or "normalise" them in "place of prior pathologisations" (Hills 2005a, 45), depictions of fans in iSAFW were restricted to fit stereotypes, rather than stereotypes being restricted to better account for those the portrayal was intended, or perceived to be intended, to represent. **GS45** lamented the fact that "a bunch of obsessives fighting" were represented in favour of more articulate fans. However, as Busse (2010) notes specifically in terms of gendered representations: "the hysterical fan girl who chooses affect over analysis... seems to be a preferable representation, thus… denying... the critical responses that pervade much of the female fan responses" (n.p). The privileging of stereotyped (gendered) representations is not then particular to *iCarly*, but part of a far broader trend.

In this light, the issues that **GS45** identified here relate back to my earlier argument about pre-judging fangirls based on ingrained cultural stereotypes which, in turn, work to silence them. In this context, it appears to matter little that some fans may be, as **GS45** put it, "enlightened" about their shipping preferences; well-worn stereotypes tend to trump any attempt at a more nuanced representation of fans, not least one that may reflect any part of their actual experiences as *iCarly* fans. While the representation may have been based on, or inspired by, Schneider's experiences in *iCarly* fandom and the fans he communicated with (as many feared and contested), it is also difficult to ignore the fact that iSAFW essentially functions as a fan stereotype checklist. The episode clearly relied on and recycled some of the most historically

pervasive (and predictable) gendered fan stereotypes, and even the jokes that accompany them (i.e. "get a life"). In terms of a representation of *iCarly* fangirls then, whether or not Schneider observed the existence of fans/fan behaviour that contravened dominant stereotypes during his time in fandom, such fans were, or claimed to be, silenced and made invisible in the episode in favour (or as a consequence) of ubiquitous pathological stereotypes. While Schneider defended the episode as a "parody" rather than a representation, fans from both the GS and Blogspot sought to defend themselves and legitimise their fandom in the face of their devaluation. At the same time, Schneider's reaffirmation of the 'hierarchy of pathology' in his blog post, to which I will now turn, can be seen to have encouraged intra-fandom distinctions as fans similarly adopted such language in their responses.

Disciplinary Strategies: 'Hierarchy of Pathology', Reintegrative Shaming, and Stigmatisation

Having analysed the episode, in the final section of the chapter I am concerned with examining both iSAFW and Schneider's subsequent blog post as strategies to discipline and shame. In particular, I focus on Schneider's explanation/reaffirmation of the 'hierarchy of pathology' in his blog post and fans' negotiations of them, examining the ways they variously challenged and incorporated these categories in their responses and sometimes levelled them at others. Although it is not always possible to determine whether fan comments are responding to the post, the episode, or both, I examine the two texts using different theories as I argue that they employ slightly different, albeit related, strategies. Firstly, drawing on the work of Johnson (2007a) I consider iSAFW as a strategy of the producer to discipline unruly fans. In the second section, I examine Schneider's blog post as a strategy that can be understood as a form of reintegrative shaming (RST) (Braithwaite 1989): a way of shaming and disciplining fans without ultimately alienating them. In the context of RST, and considering Goffman's (1963) theories on stigma, I examine the implications of the producer's strategies in relation to fans' responses to the blog post: how they can be understood within terms of reintegration, alienation, or stigmatisation; to what extent fans challenge or comply with the pathologising categories set forth in the episode/post; and how these are invoked as a strategy of

intra-fandom distinctions and policing. In the context of Schneider's reaffirmation of the pathologising categories, and by considering the episode and the blog post in these ways, the following discussion is significant in suggesting that as fangirls are a stigmatised group, their strategies in response to their in-text representation should be reconsidered outside a binary of resistant/conformist.

iSAFW as Disciplining Strategy

In his chapter, 'Fan-Tagonism', Johnson (2007a) considers in-text representations of fans in TV shows as an alternative strategy used by producers to discipline fans and "curb consumer dissent" (295). Johnson argues that in this strategy, the text "narratively construct[s] 'acceptable' fan activity—bolstering extra-textual legal measures by building critiques of unruly fans directly into the text" (ibid). As "public attacks" on fans, these can be seen to work to:

> keep other viewers in line, making it uncomfortable for readers to adopt such 'inappropriate' strategies of making sense of popular texts or to embrace so passionately materials of such dubious aesthetic merit. Such representations isolate potential fans from others who share common interests and reading practices (Jenkins 1992, 19).

Indeed, while some fans may have been united in their mutual criticism of the text (as discussed earlier), the fractions/divisions between fans in the aftermath of iSAFW can be understood, to varying extents, to have isolated some fans from each other. Not only did many fans 'disidentify' ("we're not like that") (Brunsdon 2006) from the representation, some also took up the producer's cause by similarly adopting disciplinary strategies in their policing to keep other fans in line (boundary lines constructed by Schneider's pathologising categories).

In representing fans in-text, they may be constructed as Other in order that their tastes, or practices are not in danger of "pollut[ing] sanctioned culture" (Jenkins 1992, 19). For Johnson, characters that function as stand-ins for deviant or outspoken fans work to reinforce the "hegemonic 'truth' that fans should be disregarded, mocked and even feared as obsessive, socially deviant outcasts" (297). These types of characters then serve to redraw the line between industry and audience (reinforcing power differentials), and rearticulate the distinction between 'normative' audiences and 'Othered' fans (Johnson 2007a). As I examined in the previous section, fans presented

in iSAFW distilled a whole variety of stereotypes and were mocked, feared, and essentially referred to as outcasts with no lives. Given the nature of the representation, and that so many fans considered it to be a comment on 'real-life' *iCarly* fandom, I would argue that the fan representation in iSAFW can be considered a disciplinary strategy. Having said that, it does not mean that the strategy was universally accepted or that all fans were "successfully" disciplined. In the following sections, I will examine the various ways that the strategy of disciplining fans via negative, Othered representations can be understood to function in relation to fan comments on Blogspot.

The "Truth" About Fans: Disciplining the Other

In their comment, **BS27** affirms the Othered representation and adopts pathologising language to further Other *iCarly* fans. In this sense they can be understood to have taken up the "hegemonic truth" (Johnson 2007a) that fans should be mocked:

> I felt the episode was a commentary on how it must be for you guys to deal with the insane rabid shipper fans, and how you wish they could calm down and enjoy iCarly for what it is; but how your message completely went over the heads of the insane rabid shipper fans you addressed. Nothing calms them down, Dan! Instead of getting the point, they raved about not getting a Seddie/Creddie resolution! (**BS27**).

While reasoning that the episode was intended as a commentary on Schneider's experiences in fandom, **BS27** also suggested that the reactions from "insane rabid fans" to this representation illustrated the extent to which they could *not* be disciplined. Thus, although they seem to share with Schneider the role of disciplinarian, the producer's attempt to calm them down, and hence discipline them, was considered unsuccessful. In **BS27's** apparent opinion, Schneider's disciplinary actions had failed to tame them and instead riled them up more, pushing them to further 'prove' their 'true' colours. In other words, fans' reactions to the episode only lent credence to the fangirl stereotypes that had been employed to discipline them. Although **BS27** did not explicitly distance themselves from the representation, it is arguably implied semantically ("they" and "them"). Moreover, while no clear judgement was made with regards to whether the shippers were in *need* of disciplining, **BS27**'s statement functions to rhetorically align themselves with Schneider through imagining what he might feel about the situation.

Fourth Wall, What Fourth Wall?

Schmidt (2010) argues that fan representations can be experienced as "affectionate pats", "for to be known [is] to be loved" (2.5). They can also be considered an 'obscured invitation' to participate (Ross 2008) for the fans that have the specialised knowledge to recognise there *is* an in-text representation. Conversely, they are also "a demonstration that the producers/writers of the program are aware of exactly what their fandom is doing *without* an invitation" (Felschow 2010, 6.6, original emphasis). For some fans, the sense of intimacy constructed in being "known" by the producers can be too much, or experienced as an invasion of sorts (Schmidt), especially for those that work to keep their fandom relatively hidden behind the so-called 'fourth wall'. For some *iCarly* fans, particularly those in the GS that had experience with Schneider as a guest in their community, and hence no illusion of a fourth wall, it was difficult *not* to take the fan representation personally. In these cases, the disciplinary strategy, and the means by which the representation came to be, were especially criticised. For example, **GS16** (21/11/10) declared:

> Yes there are some out there that give us a bad name, but don't act like we're all anti-social mouth breathers who are only interested in the lives of your fictional characters. It's not fair to us at all and I can't help but take it personally.
> (I won't even get into my feelings toward infultrating [*sic*] the fandom with "good intentions" and then using what you find as fodder to make fun of on your show cause that's a whole other argument).

While affirming that the representation may be true in some cases, **GS16** distanced themselves from Others "out there", by criticising the representation as homogenous. It is also notable that **GS16** referred to Schneider as "infiltrating" fandom. Infiltrating would seem to suggest he crept in surreptitiously with dubious intentions, and then, for a mere episode storyline, exploited his knowledge of fandom and his previously 'intimate' relationships with GS fans to shame them all indiscriminately. While **GS16** refrained from explaining their feelings on this matter, **GS50** (21/11/10) elaborated: "the use of Creddie and Seddie (especially considering how much Dan used to be involved in fandom) really squicked me". They thereby expressed palpable discomfort with the producer representing actual fan practices and hence breaking, or further eroding, the fourth wall.

In this context, the rearticulation of power differentials between fan and producer seems doubly palpable. While Schneider was able to "infiltrate" their community, fans were powerless to stop him as he spontaneously appeared in the GS without warning/consent, and as the famed producer, they likely didn't question his motives at the time. Moreover, in the case of negative representation, these supposed 'invitations' to participate (Ross 2008) serve as powerful reminders that "the power accorded to the fan is still most often at the mercy of the producers of the text (Felschow 2010, 1.3). Fans may feel "empowered" by the industry's recognition/awareness of them, but the cultural power they possess is actually very limited (Hills 2002), and complaining about the representation can potentially invite only further criticism/disciplinary tactics from the producer, as it arguably did in this case.

'Successful' Discipline vs. the 'Mythical Other'

In the context of fan comments, the strategy of disciplining fans via negative, Othered, representations, can be understood as most 'successful' when the representation is affirmed in relation to the self and the fan suggests they will alter their behaviour. Potentially experiencing Schneider's blog post as a gesture of support, there were a couple of fans that were encouraged to be supportive in response, and admitted their wrongdoings. For example, **BS28**, stated: "i [*sic*] think that i [*sic*] have definitely gotten carried away with this whole shipping thing. i [*sic*] am a passionate iCarly fan and it should be because of its comical jokes and hilarious acts." Accordingly, it appears that **BS28** had come around to the instructions given by the iCarlies that the show was not about romance, but about comedy. Similarly, **BS29** claimed: "I thought how you portrayed all the Creddie and Seddie fans was 100% correct. I can say this, I am a HUGE Creddie fan, and I know that i [*sic*] do act crazy sometimes." Not only then does **BS29** point to the accuracy of the representation, but also professes to speak from experience, thus lending the representation and their approval of it more legitimacy.

In contrast, for other fans, particularly those in the GS, the disciplinary strategy was entirely negated, and the subject of the representation was considered to be a 'mythical Other'. As **GS49** (23/11/10) argued:

> I know that Dan has said the episode was aimed only at crazy-obsessed
> shippers, but when this many mainstream fans feel like they were basically
> told to take their love of iCarly and stick it where the sun don't shine, then I
> don't think it's a case of hypersensitivity. Just where are all these crazy
> shippers, anyway?[96] I've seen lots of blogs, tweets, forums, etc., and I haven't
> seen any name-calling or invitations to fight. It's just bantering back and forth
> as to why a particular pairing is preferred, and attempts to show why that
> pairing is better or is more likely to happen, based on scenes from the show.

GS49 claimed they have never seen these "crazy shippers" in action and listed a
number of locations where they could have been found. They thus insinuate that the
representation is fictionalised; Schneider is unnecessarily shaming or insulting fans,
and/or exaggerating the behaviour of those he may have witnessed during his time in
fandom (a suggestion made consistently throughout the thread). The comment also
points to an interesting distinction between "crazy-obsessed" and "mainstream fans".
As a "stand in for the masses" (Thornton 1995, 5), the invocation of the mainstream in
this comment functions to contextualise and justify fan reactions; a suggestion that, if
even mainstream fans (who presumably are imagined not to engage in shipping) were
offended by the episode, than it must have been especially bad, rather than shippers
being hypersensitive. In this way it also functions as a distinction between 'overly-
obsessed' and invested shipper fans that participate in fandom culture, and
mainstream fans that do not participate in online fandom nor engage in the fan
activities represented in the episode. In this logic, if "mainstream fans", do not have
personal reasons to be offended, then any kind of fan, regardless of their level of
passion or involvement, was at risk of being offended by the episode simply by loving
the show. Accordingly, some form of 'damage control' might need to be exercised in
the wake of the controversial episode to avoid alienating the audience. In the final
section then, I consider Schneider's blog post as an attempt to reintegrate fans, yet
crucially, without undermining the episode as a disciplinary strategy intended to
shame or correct unruly shippers.

Disciplining Fans and Reintegrative Shaming

Although taken from criminology, I suggest that Braithwaite's (1989) theory of
reintegrative shaming may be useful in considering Schneider's blog post as a
disciplinary strategy. It can also work to frame and account for fans' subsequent

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[96] According to one comment on Blogspot, "crazy" fans are found on Youtube (**BS30**).

responses in terms of their negotiations (adopting, distancing, or disrupting) of the pathologising categories repeated in Schneider's post. "Reintegrative shaming is characterised by a ceremony in which the criminal act committed is denounced and community members express their disapproval of it" (Hannem-Kish 2012, 205). In this context then, the episode as a whole, but in particular the subsequent Blogspot post, can be considered the 'denouncement ceremony', with fans and their adoption of the pathologising hierarchy functioning as their expressions of disapproval for the ("criminal") behaviour of Others. Shaming that is "disintegrative" (Braithwaite 1989, 55), leads to stigmatisation and "amplifi[es] deviance by progressively casting the deviant out" (ibid, 12-13). It thus potentially fosters a pattern of deviance. In contrast, "shaming that is reintegrative shames while maintaining bonds of respect or love… sharply terminat[ing] disapproval with forgiveness" (ibid, 12). The model of reintegrative shaming relies on the agents of shaming being those close to the offender; "It is the love that offenders have for those who shame them, which allows shame to integrate rather than alienate" (Ahmed 2014[2004], 198-199). Given the fondness with which fans spoke of the characters, and considering the sheer number of BS fans attesting to their love of Schneider (despite the negative representation), both the characters and Schneider can be understood as 'shamers', and the episode followed by the blog post as a reintegrative strategy.

In the section of the post in which Schneider responded to those that felt the episode was "making fun of [fans] in a mean way", he began by specifically addressing the "enthusiastic fans" that felt as such. He implored them to not feel upset and to remember "the writers and I <u>love</u> the iCarly super-fans!" (original emphasis). In keeping with the theory of reintegration, Schneider was especially careful to reaffirm his love for this category of fans, although later he also professed to love *all* the different categorisations of fans he referred to. It would seem that the 'enthusiastic' fans he referred to here were the same as 'super-fans'; those sufficiently "enthusiastic" or "super-fan" *enough* to have been upset, or had feelings on the matter of the fan parody, but nevertheless behaved in a calm and decent manner. In this way then, this category seems to replicate the behavioural distinctions fans in the GS created to distinguish themselves from Other, disruptive fangirls (see Chapter Two).

Although Schneider admitted that the episode was a parody of "*some*" fan behaviour, he was keen to stress that it was "**only a very specific type**" who only account for "like 0.0000000001%" of the fandom (original emphasis). Again, this relates to fans in the GS describing small minorities of poorly behaved fans; yet, while it may be considered a positive move, insofar as fans are not homogenised, it is notable that such a supposedly small minority garners so much attention and discussion in both spaces. To this point, **BS9** enquired:

> why [would] you would dedicate a whole episode to the "0.0000000001%" of fans with bad behavior and not do something for the rest of your shipping fans who would actually like to see some development in your show?

Due to it being such a small percentage of fans that behaved so poorly, **BS9** implies it is illogical a whole episode would revolve around representing them, while the comparatively larger population of well-behaved shippers were left with unfulfilled desires. In the same vein, **BS12** warned: "this episode would be very risky because you would possibly alienate that part of the fan base that generate such enthusiasm". In other words, shaming enthusiastic fans could result in dampening their enthusiasm or even driving them away, and hence the producer's strategies were potentially disintegrative (alienating) rather than reintegrative.

The fans that the episode intended to parody are what Schneider referred to as the "mean fighty ones" who fight bitterly, take things *"too* far", and get "verbally abusive with others who don't agree with them." This characterisation would seem to be in alignment with the derogatory definition of fangirls as dangerous, disruptive, or obsessed to a "frightening degree" (see Introduction). Schneider refers to these fans as "crazy, extreme", "super-psycho fans". Since Hairbow and PearPad girl in iSAFW, both very enthusiastic shippers, were deemed "super-psycho", this category likely includes fangirl shippers more broadly; as though implying shipping makes a fan "super psycho", that one must be "super-psycho" in order to ship, or that shipping is an activity that cannot be undertaken in a calm or friendly manner. In the post, Schneider works to emphasise that he does not dislike these fans, but he does make clear that he believes they would "be a lot happier if they would just calm down". This statement would seem to indicate that, in Schneider's opinion, there are some kinds of fans that are too invested and overly obsessed. Accordingly, this is behaviour that he

does not consider 'healthy' or perhaps even valid, and that most certainly does not inspire a fan to be happy. In this sense then, it is suggested that it is for fans' benefit that Schneider curtails such activity, i.e. if they do not stop, they won't achieve happiness in their lives. Thus, in performing his 'social front', Schneider positions himself as a producer that cares for, and accordingly supervises, fans—not to upset them, but ultimately to make them happier. This can also be seen as a reflection of shaming that is integrative, insofar as it "acknowledges the act as an evil thing, done by a person who is not inherently evil" (Hannem-Kish 2012, 202), and in this case, an act that actively endangers the "offender".

This position can also be seen to reflect a gendered and age-based assumption. **GS47** (25/11/10) suggested that the episode felt patronising, that it appeared "As though he sees his audience as a bunch of mindless children that he has to correct". This is an assumption they identify as incorrect, in terms of both the audience and Schneider's "pretentious" perception of his own authorial power, stating: "Once an episode of iCarly airs, it's ours to interpret…does he think that shippers are going to just stop now? I mean, really? What was the point of this repetitive episode?" (**GS47**). In terms of gender, and fangirl stereotypes specifically, Mareike Herrmann (2008) argues that fangirls are cast "as malleable creatures who have little control over their emotions. As such, they are portrayed as victims in need of protection from their own self-destructive behavior" (89). In this light, Schneider's 'protective' moves on the matter of fan activities can be understood to be informed by fangirl stereotypes, and reliant on the infantalisation of fans.

In Schneider's explanation a problematic distinction is drawn between a "psycho fan" and "normal people". "Psycho fans" or "super-psycho fans" are positioned as those depicted in the episode, whereas "normal people" are those who merely feel "passionate" about *iCarly*. Whether or not "normal people" are the same as both "enthusiastic" or "super-fans" is unclear, but Schneider questioned fans:

> Do <u>you</u> act like the psycho fans you saw in the episode? Probably not. More than likely, you're just a normal person who feels passionate about iCarly. If you are, then <u>you're not the kind of fan we were parodying</u> (original emphasis).

 If it is not made abundantly clear enough that "psycho fans" are considered abnormal in some way, then this is highlighted more concretely in their constructed opposition to "normal" fans, and hence implicitly positions them as aberrant or even deviant. In this categorisation, "normal" people do not overtly perform or enact their fandom, nor engage with the text in a fervent or fannish way, but instead appreciate calmly and are not 'too' invested. Indeed, Busse (2013) notes "networks often prefer their audiences a bit less involved and invested" (77); fans are desired by the industry, but only those that are not "too fannish, too obsessive, too much" (78). In Schneider's professed opinion, "normal people" far outnumber the "super-psycho" and "psycho" fans that comprise only a tiny percentage of *iCarly* fandom. Nevertheless, the "psycho fan" minority is in need of disciplining and thus Schneider addresses them in his post:

> if you're the type who would actually get into a physical confrontation with someone over Creddie vs. Seddie (or write nasty comments online), then yeah, we were making fun of that kind of behaviour. But even so, we didn't mean it in a mean-spirited way.

The kind of fannish behaviour deemed inappropriate was therefore described as physically and/or verbally aggressive or mean, even dangerous, and somewhat reflective of the fangirl stereotype and the 'fandom as pathology' model described by Jensen (1992).

In reintegrative shaming theory, shame is the ultimate deterrent; if perpetrators experience guilt which is instilled in them by loved ones, they are thought less likely to commit further crimes. Shaming must however, reintegrate the offender in the community, rather than disintegrate them and push them further out. In regards to the episode, the narrative construction of unruly fans can be considered the producers' initial disciplinary strategy, with the *iCarly* characters as the simulated instillers of shame. Rather than Schneider independently instructing fans via Twitter (as **BS25** suggested above), having the iCarlies dismiss and correct fan practices, as well as representing within the episode their clear discomfort with fans' shipping, would seem to be most effective within the terms of reintegrative shaming. Having said that, these disciplinary strategies were not wholly "successful", as the critical and deleted comments, as well as fans' claims that they would remain undeterred in their mode of engagement, would attest. The blog post, therefore, appears as an attempt to make clear to fans that they were loved despite their transgressions, and one which provided

an opportunity to specify and elaborate on what these transgressions were. Therefore, to function as a form of reintegrative shaming, the post shames them once more by re-establishing the pathologising categories of fans referred to in the episode.

Braithwaite's theory (1989) considers shame "the ultimate deterrent against the violation of societal norms, for those who have a stake in a particular community" (Hannem-Kish 2012, 202). As fans hold a stake in their communities, shaming them via the characters and the blog post would appear to be a (potentially) effective strategy to "keep them in line" according to the producer's demands. In some cases, the strategy can be understood to have been successfully 'reintegrative', insofar as there were some fans that apologised for getting 'carried away' with shipping and forgetting what *iCarly* is 'really' about. In other cases, fans claimed Schneider's strategy was an 'overstep', claiming that he cannot control how they respond to the text and what they may do with it, and was illustrative of his misunderstanding of fandom. Fan communities often construct their own communally agreed codes of conduct that members are expected to abide by to avoid the risk of aligning themselves with stigmatising associations. Indeed, in the previous chapter, GS fans policed and shamed other fans within similar pathologising terms as did Schneider in his post, namely through invoking fangirl stereotypes. Yet, while fans may be held to similar behavioural (read: affective, performative) codes of conduct by both the producer and the fan community, the kinds of fan practices that are sanctioned by the community, particularly female/fangirl communities, are often antithetical to those welcomed (or understood) by the industry. Thus, while for many *iCarly* fans shipping was a common-sense practice—an important part of being an *iCarly* fan and a central pleasure for them—for Schneider, it was a practice that fans required disciplining if not shaming for. Unsurprisingly, as discussed earlier, a number of fans resisted this form of control, defending their right to ship, and to read the text as they desired. The shaming of fans through iSAFW, via the characters *and* the producer, did not then function in any uniform manner as the "ultimate deterrent" (ibid); practices considered acceptable by fans are different to those acceptable for Schneider, and not all fans will alter their behaviour according to the producer's demands. As the final section will demonstrate however, many fans took it upon themselves to (further) stigmatise the undisciplined fans, casting them out/alienating them via their distinction practices and thus (further) threatening fan (re)integration. This is significant in illustrating that

Schneider's attempt to reintegrate was undermined by the reiteration of the pathologising categories in the post; reiteration further legitimised these terms and enabled fans to redeploy them in their distinctions. Rather than uncritically taking up these discourses however, I argue that this redeployment strategy may be bound up in fangirls' stigmatisation and subordination.

Fans Disciplining Fans: Reconsidering Resistance/Conformist Binaries

Although, as argued above, Schneider's post can be considered to display strategies associated with reintegrative shaming, fans' strategies in response to the post do not as neatly align. Braithwaite (1989) outlines "Reintegrative shaming means that expressions of community disapproval…are followed by gestures of reacceptance into the community of law abiding citizens… Disintegrative shaming (stigmatization), in contrast, divides the community by creating a class of outcasts" (55). While community disapproval certainly occurred, gestures of reacceptance/re-welcoming were few and divisions were drawn, with those considered to most closely align with the pathologising fangirl stereotypes alienated as the outcasts. In an attempt to discursively distance themselves from the negative representation of fangirls in the episode, a significant number of fans adopted the stigmatising categories outlined in the post and episode, or used comparably insulting language against others (e.g. weird" (**BS31**), "Hopeless"(**BS32**), "Naive"(**BS13**), and "Stupid oversensitive kids!"(**BS33**), thereby "creating a class of outcasts". In this way then, these fans "accepted negative portrayals of fans as valid… [but] refused to take on that meaning for themselves, instead bracketing themselves out of it and shifting it off onto others" (Stanfill 2013, 117).

Drawing on work from sociology, Stanfill (2013) argues that marginalised groups often "form their identities in relation to the dominant culture" (121) This can be seen when members of one subgroup take up discourses the mainstream uses to stigmatise them, and redeploys them against those of another, often related, subgroup, or even those within the same group. If fans, broadly speaking, are understood as a non-normative group, then I would suggest this logic could work to account for the ways in which fangirl stereotypes are redeployed by fangirls against other (perceived to be) younger or 'girlier' fans (those within the same subgroup, but perhaps 'closer' to

stereotype). Indeed, Stanfill continues, "because they buy into their own devaluation, members of [social subcategories] sometimes seek to comply with dominant culture in order to be seen as normal" (ibid) and thus stigmatise similarly stigmatised people. As members of non-normative groups, they may also "subdivide their group into (a) themselves and others like them, whom they classify as normal, and (b) a deviant subgroup they declare actually deserves the stigma or pathologization to which the entire group is subjected" (ibid).

In relation to the episode as disciplinary strategy, I proposed earlier that fans that took up the "truth" of iSAFW's representation and assumed the role of disciplinarian (either creating distance from or pathologising the Other) could be considered examples of 'successful discipline'. However, in the context of the blog post and reintegrative shaming, these comments would appear antithetical to Schneider's strategy by further alienating the shamed fans. Although the two strategies I consider here may seem to exist then in distinct conflict, my intentions behind the (conceptual) move I make in the remainder of this section are twofold. Firstly, I wish to reconsider fan comments in light of Schneider's post and its strategy of reintegration, and secondly, I argue that it is important to take into account *iCarly* fans' already marginalised status as young female fans of a tween show. In Stanfill's (2013) terms, they are considered a non-normative group that, in some cases, have taken up the discourses that Schneider (standing in as representative of the dominant culture) used to stigmatise them, and redeployed them against those considered more 'deserving' of the fangirl stigma. In order to do this, and to close this chapter before concluding, I draw on Goffman's (1963) theories relating to stigma. This work is useful here as it considers the role of what Goffman refers to as "the normal" (the non-stigmatised person, i.e. Schneider) and the impact of their presence within a group of stigmatised individuals. In turn it also accounts for the strategies of stigmatised individuals in relation to their fellow stigmatised people.

Drawing on these theories works to further nuance this chapter's discussion of the difficulties in challenging the pathologisation/stigmatisation of fangirls *as* a fangirl. In this context I suggest that as already stigmatised individuals, the desire to bracket oneself off from the stigmatisation and cast it on to others may be particularly strong, regardless of the extent to which fans may be similar in terms of their practices and

performances. In this way, intra-fandom shaming need not be simply (or exclusively) understood as fans' internalisation of misogynistic discourses, or complicity in their own discrimination/devaluation. Likewise, I also propose that while only a minority of fan comments on Blogspot (keeping in mind negative comments were deleted) directly challenged or criticised iSAFW/Schneider, this need not be considered necessarily evidence of the majority's uncritical or passive acceptance. Rather, that as already indiscriminately stigmatised individuals, the sheer persistence of fangirl stereotypes and their subsequent devaluation on these terms, may disempower them from breaking out of the mould that has been set to contain them and silence them as young female fans. In this way, the resistance/conformist binary is insufficient in accounting for the complexities of fangirls' experiences and their role as (active) negotiators of pathologising stereotypes.

Stigmatisation and 'In-Group Purification'

Stigma is understood as a set of undesirable characteristics that, taken together, form a stereotype and are applied to a particular person or group of people. Once stigmatised, it is difficult to rid oneself of that stigma unless the characteristics associated with it are undetectable. The fangirl stereotype for instance, has come to stand in for a set of undesirable characteristics and behaviours. While widely applied to any fan displaying such characteristics—regardless of age and gender—fangirl labels are also indiscriminately applied (and levied as an insult) to young female fans. Due to their age and gender, the label is often then applied regardless of the detectability of the negative attributes that form the stereotype. As fans are heavily stigmatised and negatively stereotyped, discursive distancing or 'disidentification' can be understood as a strategy through which to rid oneself of the stigma by further stigmatising others. In this sense, it functions as a form of 'self-preservation', if not self-legitimisation, that has the (potentially unintended) consequence of perpetuating, rather than challenging, the stereotype and its underlying age-specific brand of misogyny.

In relation to subdivisions within stigmatised groups, Goffman (1963) argues:

> The stigmatized individual exhibits a tendency to stratify his 'own' according to the degree to which their stigma is apparent and obtrusive. He can then take up in regard to those who are more evidently stigmatized than himself the attitudes the normal take to him... It is in his affiliation with, or separation

> from, his more evidently stigmatized fellows, that the individual's oscillation of identification is most sharply marked (107).

In these terms then, fans classify their own behaviour in relation to that of Others, marking them against the stereotype to which they are all subjected, and find others more apparently exhibiting, or 'worthy' of, the stigma associated with 'fangirl' in its negative definition. In turn, this enables them to occupy the position of "the normal" (Goffman 1963), or what could otherwise be referred to as the non-fan or even 'shamer', and similarly dismiss, devalue, or shame the 'more' evidently stigmatised. Hence, on Blogspot, some *iCarly* fans assumed the position that Schneider had in his post, and took up his pathologising categories to shame and alienate those considered to more closely align with the negative fangirl stereotype.

Regardless of how close one is with their own kind, the stigmatised "may exhibit identity ambivalence when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way" (Goffman 1963, 107). This results in fans underplaying their fandom as less disruptive or less invested than those considered to display undesirable characteristics, and thus seen as 'proving' right the fangirl stereotype. Whilst maintaining their own fan status, this strategy can arguably be seen reflected in **BS4**'s comment: "all I kept thinking during the episode was that if we, the people who comment on this blog were there we'd be like "Seriously? you guys are fighting over this?"". Faced with obviously disruptive, obsessive fans represented in the episode, **BS4** undermined such behaviour by questioning/invalidating the reasons behind it and positioning it as nonsensical. Arguably then, they took on the role of "the normal", 'non-fan', or 'shamer' who cannot understand why fans fight over 'trivial' issues in the first place. **BS4** also appears to classify the collective behaviour of "we, the people" on Blogspot against that seen by fans in the episode and thus suggests, via discursive distancing, that "we" would never behave like "them". Or further, that "we" don't even understand what it is "they" are fighting about because "we" are so far removed from that mindset. As a consequence, the stereotype is seemingly validated, rather than challenged, although **BS4** did not directly pathologise the Other.

Goffman (1963) also refers to a strategy of "in-group purification"; a tendency of stigmatised people to "'normify' their own conduct but also to clean up the conduct of others in the group" (108). This concern is most acute in instances whereby the

stigmatised individual identifies in close sight "an undesirable instance of his own kind while 'with' a normal" (ibid). Taking Schneider as "the normal", or 'shamer', and both/either the fictional fans and those that complained about the episodes as the "undesirables", dynamics within the Blogspot comments can then be seen as reflecting a process of 'in-group purification'. Concern with purifying the group is "guided by the idea that the minority's troubles are rooted in the misguided ways of a small fraction among them" (Seeman 1958, 29). To take Schneider's statement that most fans are just "normal people" who feel "passionate" about the show, this would then cast shippers as a minority and hence "mean fighty" shippers as a smaller faction within that minority, i.e. the "0.0000000001%" Schneider referred to. The larger faction of the minority group, the shippers, then display a "need to prove that the impurity really is not there" (ibid, 29), or at least that they themselves are not one of the "impure" few. For example, **BS34** commented:

> Look, I enjoy shipping as much as the next guy, but let's remember it's wrong to be that involved. Just take a step back, take a deep cleansing breath, and remember it's all fake. It's not worth getting upset about.

While **BS34** claimed they enjoy shipping, they also 'normified' their own conduct via instructing other fans how to calm down. By then building on Schneider's earlier 'protectionist' moves and claims that shippers would be happier if they calmed down, they also appear to attempt to 'normify' the conduct of others.

Taking this further, **BS35** laments shippers' perceived inabilities to enjoy the show in the way that Schneider instructed:

> I love iCarly for what it is, not for the shippings or anything. Even though I'm a Seddie shipper, I just love the show itself. …I just wish all the Creddie and Seddie shippers out there would realize this and just watch the show and appreciate it for what it is like me.

BS35 implies that the trouble with shippers is that some of them are misguided, failing to love *iCarly* "for what it is", as they claim they do. Wishing that other shippers would do the same, they create distance from Others, elevate their own status, and point to the difficulties in cleaning up other fans' behaviour. In the following and final example, it is possible to see the way in which one fan becomes involved in attempting to remedy the impurity, that is, if indeed it actually exists.

Stating that they are a Seddie shipper, **BS36** replied to a Creddier on Blogspot:

> Hello :) I'm a Seddier, and I'll say this to you: I wanted to make news by commenting on another ship's post and saying something positive. Not sure why. So Hi!! I agree with everything you said. And I'm another ship. So yeah, everyone, this DOES happen.

In contradicting the representation in iSAFW, **BS36** appears concerned here to prove that fans of conflicting ships do not always fight, and they are capable of being friendly to each other. As this final section illustrates, some fans attempted to challenge their fellow fans. Even if they were not directly challenging the stereotyped representation, they were also not directly pathologising others' behaviours. As already stigmatised individuals, these negotiations of the stereotype standout as a measured attempt to clean up the conduct of others that may in turn, at least potentially, lessen the validity of the stereotype.

Conclusion

Stanfill (2013) argues that "to exist as a fan is to be both (a) immersed in dominant ideas about the ''right way'' to interact with the media and (b) emotionally invested in a subculture that is often understood to violate those norms" (118). In this case study, I have considered the ways in which the producer communicated to fans his own ideas about the 'right way' to interact with the text, and the disciplinary strategies he employed to curtail fan practices that appeared to 'violate' his personal vision of the text (as comedy not romance). In this context I examined the various ways in which fans responded to their in-text representation, to the producer's demands set forth in the episode, and how their comments functioned in relation to the producer's strategies in both text and blog post. To some extent, iSAFW can be understood as a 'successful' disciplinary strategy, insofar as a number of fans admitted to their 'wrong doings'. On the other hand, Schneider's ideas about the right way to read and interpret *iCarly* were often in distinct opposition to the desires and practices of the fan community. For some, the ways in which they identified with the text, and found pleasure in *iCarly* fandom, was based precisely on their gendered/generational subjectivities and thus Schneider's adamant opinion that they were reading it 'wrong' or desiring the "wrong things' was particularly disheartening, if not potentially

experienced as personal. Consequently, a number of fans defended their right to ship, to wish for the text to include character relationships, and to interpret the text as they desired, and thus criticised Schneider's attempt to instruct their practices and shame them for their investments.

Analysing the blog post as a form of reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite 1989) then complicated any neat evaluation of Schneider's strategies in light of fan responses. While for many, the mere existence of the blog post indicated his concern for fans, and hence they were 'reintegrated', some fans simultaneously repurposed the pathologising categories he rehashed from iSAFW and restated in his post, and used them against others. In this sense then, Schneider's categories—using language already used by fans that do not need further legitimisation—threatened reintegration by creating divisions in fandom and potentially alienated others as some fans took up Schneider's role of disciplinarian. In the context of more open communication channels between fans and producers via social media, and hence the heightened visibility of fannish practices, strategies resembling reintegrative shaming may become more common. With fans' heightened sense of ownership and the 'right to reply', and the industry's increased awareness of (unsanctioned) fan practices, TPTB's attempts to wrestle back some control over fans/textual interpretations may become more frequent, but they must do so without alienating them entirely. In considering fan/producer interactions, Braithwaite's (1989) theory therefore provided a useful model in this context, and should be further examined within fan studies.

By analysing the episode, I have illustrated the extent to which iSAFW was structured by, and reliant on, gendered stereotypes of fans. This scenario indicates that fans not only remain pathologised in mainstream media, but also that their pathologisation remains distinctly gendered. In turn, and in countering any broad claims that fan identities are newly normalised in convergence culture's 'mainstreaming' of fandom, the continued potency of the fangirl stereotype suggests that fan representations in fannish texts demand more academic attention than they have thus far, and continued scrutiny going forward. Accordingly, fan studies should remain concerned with challenging 'fandom as pathology' (Jensen 1992), but more specifically, ignite its concern with '*fangirl* as pathology'. Indeed, increasingly, as Scott (2011) argues, "the pathologized modes of fandom that Jensen described are being constructed by the

media and fanboys alike as something *fangirls* do" (83, original emphasis). In challenging pathologised representations, gender should remain a critical focus, but age/gender intersectionality should comprise a further axis to consider.

Alongside the episode analysis, a central project of this chapter was to explore how fans negotiate their pathologised and stereotypical representation. Herrmann (2008) argues that while girls can find agency in fandom, the uncritical acceptance of negative fangirl stereotypes can limit the empowering potential of fandom. Conflating agency and empowerment, Herrmann concludes in her empirical study "the question of agency seems to depend at least in part on how girls negotiate external definitions of fans" (101). By this logic, it is therefore suggested that if girls do not adequately negotiate or resist cultural stereotypes about young female fandom then their agency diminishes and they are thus passive, powerless, and compliant. This position thereby reflects the tendency to study girls in reference to binaries of active/passive and resistance/conformist. I have argued here and throughout this thesis that a less divisive approach, outside binary logic, should be employed when studying girls: one that accounts for girls as active negotiators and the communitarian nature of their culture(s). In this chapter specifically, I have also proposed that girls' challenges to their own devaluation, or lack thereof, should be reconsidered in light of their stigmatisation and already marginalised position**.**

Felschow (2010) advises against a simple equation between 'misrepresentation' and disempowerment, and equally, I would be cautious about one between the negotiation of negative discourses and agency/empowerment. In a similar vein as girls' studies scholars Gonick et al. (2009) proclaim, albeit in the context of girl fans specifically, I am interested in a revised approach to conceptualising girls agency and resistance— one "perhaps more complex and nuanced" (2). One of the elements missing from Herrmann's equation is a consideration of the ways in which fangirls are, to some extent, denied agency by the discourses that are set to contain them.

As the analysis of iSAFW attests, fangirl stereotypes remain firmly entrenched in popular culture, to the extent that they could almost be considered to have reached 'truth status'. These stereotypes, I have argued, can also be understood to silence fangirls whereby their thoughts, feelings, voices, and their complaints and challenges to their own construction are easily disregarded as trivial on the basis that they are, or

perceived to be 'just' teenage girls. More than that, they are considered 'hysterical', 'rabid' fangirls, and by speaking out at all, regardless of how loud they express themselves or the content of their expressions, they only (unwittingly) lend further credence to the cultural construction of the disruptive and unruly fangirl stereotype. Thus they are shutdown once more, the stereotype perpetuates, and it becomes particularly difficult to be heard when vocally challenging their own marginalisation. Indeed, the deleting of critical fan comments on Blogspot and fans' policing of those that complained for showing their" true colours" would seem to attest to this.

What is also missing is attention paid to fangirls' stigmatisation, and the ways in which stigmatised people form their identities in relation to the dominant culture (Stanfill 2013). Drawing on Goffman's (1963) theories on stigma assisted in understanding the ways in which the behaviour of fangirls as stigmatised people may shift in the presence of "the normal". In turn, it also suggested that fans applying negative discourses to others (rather than challenging them) should not be necessarily taken as their uncritical or passive acceptance of them. Rather, for girl fans to take up the pathologising discourses used against them by "the normal", and apply these terms to others, can be understood as a product of their devalued and stigmatised position. Re-considering fangirls in this way, again makes it possible to escape binary logic at the same time as it also takes seriously the constraints of their position as a result of age/gender discrimination. Of course, the internalisation of misogynistic discourses is also likely at play here—I am not denying that internalisation occurs, nor that it isn't implicated in this context—however, I propose there is a more complex set of dynamics at work here than appears to have been acknowledged in fan studies scholarship, particularly in regards to fangirls. When considering fangirls it is important to take into account their uniquely stigmatised position and the further complexities wrought by age/gender inequalities.

Chapter Four:

iCarly Fans Countdown: (Fangirl) Squeeing, (Becoming-a-fan) Stories, and Saying Goodbye

Fan studies, by its nature, takes seriously affective relationships with, and emotional attachments to, media objects and the work that such investment produces. Nevertheless, as Matt Hills (2002) points out, there is a need for researchers to pay closer attention to fans' emotional alliances and the affective dimensions of fandom, rather than privileging the cognitive dimensions of meaning production.[97] In response to this call, Jenkins (2006c[2002]) criticised the implied separation of meaning making processes from fans' pleasures and desires. In relation to Nancy Baym's (1998) term "socioemotional" which connects them together, Jenkins suggests instead that "when fans talk about meaningful encounters with texts, they are describing what they feel as much as what they think" (140). This suggestion has not been fully applied, particularly in relation to young female fans or fangirls. Moreover, while affect is acknowledged as deeply implicated in meaning making practices, fan studies has largely considered these in relation to the fictional world of the fantext, rather than in the context of fans' own lives.

In this chapter, I focus precisely on fan emotion; the feelings fans lay claim to, their reflections on their meaningful encounters with *iCarly*, and what *iCarly*/fandom meant to them in their lives. Emotion is crucial in the context of this thesis, firstly, because fangirls are routinely dismissed on account of their display of intense emotionality, and secondly, because their emotions are routinely devalued as trivial. In this case study I propose that *iCarly* fans on Tumblr are finding power in emotional expression and recuperating 'fangirl' as a positive, even feminist act. That rather than distancing themselves from the stereotype that devalues them, their fannish performance online mimics the embodied emotionality of fangirls represented in media images. In addition, while emotion is linguistically performative, it is also meaningful in the context of their lived experiences. Fangirl 'squee' is systematically dismissed as a mere affectation, devoid of 'authenticity', and fangirls often characterised "as a mindless horde: one huge, undifferentiated emerging

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[97] See also: Hills in Jenkins (2006d).

hormone" (Grant, in Lynskey 2013). I argue in this chapter that emotional expression through fandom, and participating in fandom spaces can perform important functions in young adulthood. While "Fan scholars are well aware of the power that cultural objects have on self-narratives and emotional wellbeing" (Harrington et al. 2011, 580), the power of fandom for young people and their growing up alongside fictional characters has not been fully examined.

Fan scholars have acknowledged that asking fans to be self-reflexive in the context of fan research, and when interacting with a researcher, they may become defensive as they seek to justify their fandom and thus evacuate their accounts of emotionality as they over-emphasise the rational attributes (Duffett 2013; Hills 2002). As I discussed in Chapter One, the data gathered on Tumblr is a very particular kind of data as it is not 'naturally occurring' discourse in the same way as that in the previous two chapters. Rather, this chapter is based on an analysis of fan responses to a fan-created survey that circulated on Tumblr during the run-up to *iCarly*'s series finale. Although fans answered the survey questions without intervention from a researcher, these questions still intervened in their reality, and asked them to reflect on their fan experiences in a thoughtful and extended manner in ways they may not ordinarily. Whilst fans may have been less defensive than they might have been had a researcher intervened, and they may have been more comfortable emphasising emotionality in the accounts that they shared in the tag, their self-narratives are still highly performative (Crowther 1999; Hills 2005c). In fact, I argue that emotional expression is a way in which these fans can be seen to demonstrate their belonging in the community and perform their fangirl identities and thus, they did not appear to evacuate their accounts of emotionality. Yet, while Tumblr may provide a space in which girls can engage in self-disclosure and emotional self-expression, and as a 'fangirl space', fans may be better positioned to resist 'fangirl as pathology' and reclaim emotion as powerful, their responses are still located within a broader context in which 'fangirl' is devalued. As this thesis has argued, fangirl stereotypes are both potent and pervasive, and the negotiation of these can be understood to structure and exist in tension with fans' survey answers. Therefore, fans may continue to position themselves in their self-narratives in ways that seek to distance themselves from fangirl stereotypes, and even in subtle ways, may continue to defend and legitimise their fannish identities and pleasures.

This chapter is split into four sections. Having outlined the details of the challenge, and the questions posed, I move on to discuss Tumblr as a fan space. Although Tumblr is one of, if not the, most popular platforms used by fans today, it is relatively under-researched and not always well understood. I therefore give particular focus to the ways in which fans use, communicate, and perform on Tumblr. In particular, in fan culture at least, Tumblr often appears to be considered a particularly gendered space. Acknowledging the supposedly gendered nature of Tumblr, and conceptualising it as a 'fangirl space', I suggest that this can be understood through a consideration of Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber's (2000[1976]) theory of girls and bedroom culture (see Chapter One).

McRobbie and Garber suggested girls' culture offers different forms of resistance and girls negotiate a "different space" (221), their subcultures located within the private or domestic sphere, or more specifically, the bedroom as a distinct cultural form. Since the 1990s, girls have been associated with "digital bedrooms" (Sefton-Green and Buckingham 1998), "virtual bedrooms" (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002; 2007), and hence "virtual bedroom culture" (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004). In this context, girls' home pages, personal websites, and more recently blogs and social media have been considered analogous to physical rooms as separate, safe, semiprivate, and social spaces (Dobson 2008; Martínez 2007; Mitchell and Reid Walsh 2007; Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004). Accordingly, for this chapter, it does not seem a huge leap to compare Tumblr blogs to a bedroom space in the same ways. In doing so I conceptualise Tumblr blogs, or fannish corners of Tumblr itself, as a social, 'productive space' (Kearney 2007) that facilitates self-disclosure and self-expression (Stern 2002), one in which girls are able to explore and construct identity (Polak 2007; Stern 2002), and speak and be heard (Stern 2002), as they are seen "producing a self-narrative in a public arena" (Martínez 2007, 96). This is particularly pertinent to this case study as I examine fans' emotional expressions and reflections on their self-development in the context of the ending of *iCarly*.

Building on this concept, in the following section I examine the fangirl identity on Tumblr as linguistically performative. In expressing emotion and performing affect through language I argue that, rather than distance themselves from a gendered fan identity—specifically the much pathologised and embodied performance of fandom

seen in media images of adolescent female fans in public spaces—fangirls' embodied emotionality is instead brought into being and made visible online through what I refer to as 'mimetic language'. For *iCarly* fans on Tumblr, I suggest that this language functions to express one's belonging to the community and their emotional investment in the fan object, constituting a different kind of performance than that seen in the previous two chapters.

In the third section, I then turn more specifically to questions that fans answered for the challenge, focusing first on 'becoming-fan-stories' (Cavicchi 1998). Rather than a 'conversion', I conceptualise 'becoming a fan' as a transformative process (Zittoun 2006), and I introduce here my use of key terms and concepts that are used throughout the remainder of the chapter. Focusing on one narrative in-depth, I consider in what ways fans may position themselves in their 'personal narrative performances' (Scheidt 2006) in relation to fangirl stereotypes, and the importance of community in understanding oneself as a fan.

Taking into account the stage of life of these fans, in the final section I draw on aspects of theories that have developed from psychology to examine fans' affective connections to *iCarly*/fandom. In particular, I combine Zubernis and Larsen's (2012) work on 'Fandom as Therapy' with the work of cultural psychologist, Tania Zittoun, to conceptualise the fan object/fandom as a 'symbolic' resource' (Zittoun 2006) that is used generatively and therapeutically to help work through 'transitions' and 'ruptures' in their lives. Zittoun's work is particularly key for this chapter in examining the distinctive functions fandom may perform in youth transitions—from adolescence through to young adulthood. In saying goodbye to *iCarly,* I argue that the process of narrating one's fannish trajectory provides an opportunity to simultaneously chart their own personal development, give meaning to experiences, and reflect on their lived experiences—those lived in tandem with their fandom, as well as for some, to project to their future. Although this is not the case for all fans, drawing on Zittoun's theories on the use of 'symbolic resources' in youth development/transitions allows for an exploration of how fans understand the meanings of fandom in relation to their gendered/generational subjectivities.

Zittoun's work also assists in considering what fans might *do* with *iCarly*/fandom—not in relation to the text and its fictional world, as in the previous chapters—but to their own personal lived experiences; those that *exceed* the text and spill over to the 'real'. Hills (2002) argues it "seems impossible to take fandom seriously without taking fan psychology seriously" (22). Not only is it rare that girl fans/fangirls are considered seriously, but rarely is it acknowledged that there is significant meaning and depth behind their affective fan performances. Taking fan psychology seriously is, I argue, a crucial project in countering the trivialisation and routine dismissal of fangirl fandom.

'13 Days of *iCarly*'

In the run-up to *iCarly*'s final episode on 23 November 2012, two fans (**TR1** and **TR2**) launched a challenge on Tumblr for other fans to answer one question every day for thirteen days to reminisce about their favourite *iCarly* moments as they began to bid farewell to the show. The format of responses for the '13 Days of iCarly' challenge was left open, allowing individuals to choose whether they used gifs, images or text; most participants used a mixture of all three. In the spirit of bringing fans together for *iCarly*'s final moments, and as a "nice send-off" (**TR1**, 11/11/12) for the show, the challenge was designed to be ship-neutral and all-inclusive. While *iCarly* fandom had long been saturated by drama and ship warring during the show's run, as the previous two chapters have already made clear, the challenge encouraged participants to put that aside and "have fun" (ibid) for the last of couple weeks. Accordingly, the entries posted for the challenge maintained a friendly and supportive tone, with one Seddie shipper even apologising to Creddiers for past conflicts. It is clear however, that the majority of those who took part were Seddie shippers, rendering the posts left by the only three (self-defined) Creddiers distinctly apologetic in comparison to the candid nature of the majority.

The questions posed in the challenge were as follows:

> Day 1. When/why did you start watching?
> Day 2. Favourite episode?
> Day 3. Favourite character?
> Day 4. Favourite ship?
> Day 5. Favourite Carly moment?

Day 6. Favourite Freddie moment?
Day 7. Favourite Sam moment?
Day 8. Favourite Spencer moment?
Day 9. Favourite Gibby moment?
Day 10. Favourite guest star?
Day 11. Favourite kiss?
Day 12. Favourite iCarly.com video?
Day 13. Say goodbye to iCarly.

The first and last questions in the challenge most explicitly invite fans to reflect on their own personal journey, from the *iCarly* pilot to the finale. However, a large proportion of respondents utilised most of the challenge questions as an opportunity to chart the characters' development alongside their own experiences of growing up, and to reflect on their relation to the characters on screen. The questions answered within the tag are then particularly revealing in terms of each individual's deep and personal investment in the series and the impact of fandom on their lives. While I focus on questions one and two, there are references to other questions where necessary. Concentrating on these questions provides an opportunity to observe and analyse fans' 'personal narrative performances' (Scheidt 2006) in terms of how they self-reflexively and explicitly position and label themselves as fans/fangirls—and thus negotiate fangirl stereotypes—and the meanings that they claim *iCarly*/fandom had in relation to their lived experiences.

Eighty-two fans responded to the original challenge post via reblogging or liking. A total of forty-five fans then took part in the challenge, although not all of them completed every question. Eleven fans (24% of 45) answered all thirteen questions, and twenty-three (51% of 45) answered less than seven. Eleven fans did not provide any information on their blogs as to their name, age, location, or gender. There was just one participant who explicitly identified as male. The participants who stated their age on their blogs were roughly between 15-25 at the time of the challenge, and between 10-19 when the show first premiered; thus for these fans, their time in *iCarly* fandom coincided with a significant developmental period in their lives. In some cases it was possible to estimate approximate age based on the question "when/why did you start watching", since many recalled what year in school they were in at the time, while others referred to the fact that they were attending university presently. Seven participants included links on their blogs to their own fanfiction and one was a

'vidder'. The above demographic data (age/gender) was taken into account when considering fans' answers to the survey questions I focus on here, and drawing conclusions in relation to the themes explored in this chapter. In what follows I briefly outline the form and function of Tumblr and then turn to a discussion of Tumblr as bedroom culture. This is significant in illustrating the ways in which Tumblr can be understood to facilitate identity exploration/experimentation and emotional self-expression, both of which are particularly important for girls and young women, and thus the fans under study in this chapter.

Fandom Moves to Tumblr

Tumblr History and Communication

Founded by David Karp in 2007, Tumblr is a microblogging platform and social network. The name is derived from 'tumblelogs', meaning a short-form blog, and 'weblogging' (Cheshire 2012). 'Tumblelogs' are quick-fire blog posts that resemble an "internet-enabled stream of consciousness" (ibid, n.p). In its role as a platform for "creativity and self-expression"[98] Tumblr distinguishes itself from other social networks or blogging platforms by offering support for seven different forms of media. In Tumblr's 'personal' statement it states, "Tumblr celebrates creativity. We want you to express yourself freely and use Tumblr to reflect who you are, and what you love, think, and stand for".[99] In this context, 'freedom' allows users to upload text, photos, quotes, links, dialogue, audio, and video.

Tumblr allows users to be creative through the curation of the content that they select, straddling a space somewhere between the created and consumed (Felluga 2011 cited in Booth 2013), and an archive that can be shared with other users, functioning as "a sort of community blog" (Fries 2013, 50). Yet despite its multimedia support, Tumblr is particularly image-heavy, with an estimated 42% of original posts blogged being photos or images of some kind (Cheshire 2012). Since fandom thrives, if not lives and dies, by discussion and debate, some fans have expressed concern that fan culture will suffer with images replacing discourse; potentially taking the interpretive act out of

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[98] Tumblr. n.d. "Community Guidelines". https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community. [Accessed 3/7/14]. See also: Nuttall (2013); Tomchak (2014).
[99] Ibid.

fandom, and encouraging "passive participation rather than actual participatory responses (Romano 2012, n.p). However, in the 13 days tag, fans tended to post images in conjunction with/as illustrations for their written content, and given the similar nature of their interpretations of the text/characters, individual posts can be understood as reflective of the groups' previous discussions and debates together.

Another dominant criticism by fans is the difficulty in communicating with others on the platform (Romano 2012). Tumblr's interface is not primarily designed to foster discussion; there is no linear or threaded posting board, and no (open or closed) groups one can join akin to those on Facebook. Nevertheless, group discussions can take place via its system of reblogging, by adding further text to posts, and by users tagging each other in their posts (to notify them of the discussion). Indeed, vigorous, thoughtful discussions, particularly those concerned with socio-political issues, or 'social justice', occur consistently on Tumblr (Karp in Tomchak 2014). Moreover, and particularly pertinent to this thesis, girls and young women not only take part in these conversations, but often play critical roles in driving them (Dowling 2014).

Tumblr as Fangirl Space and Bedroom Culture

Over the past few years Tumblr has grown dramatically, cementing it as one of the fastest growing social networking sites (Lipsman 2011). Tumblr is most popular among the teen and university-age user segments with more than 50% of the visitor base under the age of 25 (Tomchak 2014). Teenagers aged 12-17 are twice as likely to visit Tumblr as 'the average internet user', and 18-24 year olds almost two and a half times more likely (Lipsman 2011). As well as a forum largely inhabited by young people, Tumblr is also quite heavily gendered. In May 2012, ComScore released an overview of European internet usage statistics that reveal Tumblr to be one of the most "women-oriented web properties", with the highest concentration of usage among women accounting for 69% of the time spent on the networking site in a one month period.[100] The reasons for its gender skew are debateable, with a range of

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[100] Comscore. 2012. "European Women Drive Majority of Engagement at Online Retail and Community Websites". 2 July. http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2012/7/European-Women-Drive-Majority-of-Engagement-at-Online-Retail-and-Community-Websites. [Accessed 16/2/13].

popular ideas/theories circulating on the internet.[101]

I propose that there are three possible reasons for the gendered nature of Tumblr. Firstly, fandom's mass-migration from LJ forcefully drove the network's popularity, appropriating it for fannish purposes (see Chapter Two). Although fandom continues to exist outside Tumblr, it is arguably a central platform; so much so that Aja Romano (2013b) suggests that "for all intents and purposes, Tumblr culture is fandom culture" (n.p), and most of the largest and most popular fandoms on the site are heavily female orientated (e.g. One Direction, *Supernatural,* and *Sherlock*). Secondly, Tumblr is particularly suitable for 'fangirl modes of fandom' (see Chapter One). Female fans have historically collected fan magazines, autographs, and still-shots (Coppa 2009) and Tumblr's heavy focus on images would therefore seem conducive to contemporary practices associated with female fans; creating screen caps, exchanging images, and making GIFs. Of course this is not a strict delineation, (and moreover, could be seen as gender essentialist) but its facilitation of fangirl modes of engagement may contribute to the gendered nature of the platform.

Thirdly, I argue the attraction of Tumblr for the young and female majority demographic can be further understood by turning to McRobbie and Garber's (2000[1976]) theory of girls and bedroom culture and its relation to identity construction. As a "private social space" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001, 2), one of "great significance and personal reflexivity" (Bloustien 2002, 442), the bedroom has long been associated with teenage girls and their search for personal identity through self-presentation, and the development and display of taste. In recent years, a number of scholars have revisited theories of bedroom culture, its meanings and practices in a contemporary context (Bovill and Livingstone 2001; Hodkinson and Lincoln 2008; Kearney 2007; Lincoln 2004; Livingstone 2007; Martínez 2007; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002; 2007; Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004), and updated it to account for the many changes that girlhood and girls' culture have undergone in the (almost) four decades since its inception.

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[101] See: Reddit. 2011. "Psychology: Why is Reddit 85% Male and Tumblr the Opposite?". 30 December. http://www.reddit.com/r/AskSocialScience/comments/nw5jw/psychology_why_is_reddit_85_male_and_tumblr_the/c3d1vye?context=1. [Accessed 16/2/13].

As an increasingly "media-rich space" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001, 3) in which teenagers spend much of their time producing and consuming online content, Mary Celeste Kearney (2007)[102] has critiqued McRobbie and Garber's theorisation of the bedroom as a space primarily constructed through girls' media consumption. Countering the "consumerist perspective [that] remains dominant in contemporary studies of girls' media practices", Kearney (2007) has problematised the historical framing of girls' bedrooms as "nonproductive cultural spaces" (126), and further argued that digital technologies have increased girls' cultural productivity (in the domestic sphere). By producing their own media from their bedrooms and disseminating it across the internet, Kearney (2007) argues that girls have altered bedroom culture by subverting "the public/private binary that has historically limited girls' experiences" (126). The internet has now facilitated a "global circuit" (Nayak and Kehily 2013, 72) of youth culture connections between their physical bedrooms (Hanna cited in Gachman 2013), and "the amplification of … girls voices beyond the walls of their bedrooms… is a significant development in both girlhood and girls' culture" (Kearney 2007, 138). Conceptualising Tumblr in these terms, and drawing on notions of bedroom culture in this case study, can serve to make sense of the ways in which girl fans use their blogs as a space to share their interests with others, experiment with identity in a public space, perform a fannish identity, and significantly, engage in emotional self-expression and self-narrativisation. Considering Tumblr as bedroom culture thus works to frame discussions throughout this chapter and in particular, discussions regarding Tumblr as a space in which girls are potentially able to have a voice and be heard.

That the internet seemingly offers girls a space in which they can speak at all is important. "For much of history girls have been socialized to be seen and not heard" (Kearney 2007, 138), and Brown and Gilligan (1992) suggest that as girls go through adolescence many experience a "loss of voice". Brown and Gilligan (1992) characterise the silencing of adolescent girls as "a struggle to authorize or take seriously their own experience" (6). While there may remain a shortage of spaces for girls to publically and safely engage in self-narrative, Susannah Stern (2002), identifies the internet as a public forum in which girls can be found to be sharing

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[102] See also: Kearney (1998).

personal stories. Indeed, a high percentage of blogs are authored by girls and young women (Bell 2007; Bortree 2005), and a number of scholars agree they are predominantly focused on the personal (Scheidt 2006; Stern 2002). In this way, blogs and homepages have frequently been understood as having their roots in journals or diaries, which have been historically linked to girls. Blogs offer a virtual space in which girls can speak, and they may even facilitate self-disclosure (Stern 2002), however, the crucial difference is that blogs are public. Blogs exist in a "contradictory space—a private space that exists openly in a *public* domain" (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004, 181), and their public nature has been identified as particularly appealing to girls (Bell 2007; Stern 2002; see Chapter One). Akin to a bedroom space, girls may find blogs to be a "comfortable rather than a threatening space" (Cadle 2005, 4). Being a public space however, offers a range of other benefits, namely support from other young women (ibid), while having an audience provides an opportunity to "blend personal narrative with performance characteristics" (Scheidt 2006, 196). Indeed, the performative nature of blogs is particularly key in the context of this chapter, as I will discuss further in the context of becoming-fan narratives.

By constructing a personal website, girls can obtain a virtual "room of one's own", a space of "creativity and sociality" (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004, 174). In this light, girls' fandom/Tumblr blogs stand as prime examples of the ways in which girls are using digital technologies to replicate their bedroom culture online (Martínez 2007) and are transforming bedroom culture itself within the public sphere. As I illustrate throughout this chapter, fangirls do not only consume, but produce digital media. In scholarship thus far, Tumblr blogs have not been considered in terms of girls' 'virtual bedroom culture', but building on Reid-Walsh and Mitchell's (2004) concept, and the literature discussed above, I suggest that there are a number of productive parallels, particularly in the context of young female fans and the performative gendered fangirl identity that *iCarly* fans perform in this space. I later illustrate notable parallels through a discussion of 'fangirl language', and a consideration of the intermingling of the text and personal as I examine the ways in which fans' use *iCarly*/fandom as a vehicle for therapeutic and emotional self-expression. Firstly, in the remainder of this section, I consider in what ways Tumblr can be understood as a 'virtual bedroom' space that facilitates identity construction and self-presentation. This is significant in illustrating the ways in which Tumblr can

be understood as a particularly apt space for the performance and exploration of fangirl identities.

Tumblr and Flexible Identity

Like a bedroom, Tumblr blogs appear to be personable, like a journal or museum of "me", created by girls to express their personality, tastes, and interests. Just as identity is not fixed or singular, Tumblr blogs, like the bedroom, are customisable and alterable and thus they can "act as a repository for the shifting conception of self so necessary for growth in the adolescent" (Cadle 2005, 56).[103] For cultural sociologist and tech ethnographer, Tricia Wang (2013a), it is the vast range of options that Tumblr offers its users that marks it as a befitting space for flexible identity expression, arguing that Tumblr has "respect for unbounded, flexible identity" (n.p). Not just because users are able to customise their blogs, but because they can also run several different blogs simultaneously, each reflecting different aspects of their identity.

Wang (2014) argues Tumblr is an "unbounded" social network with an informal mode (it does not enforce real name registration as on Facebook) that allows for a wider spectrum of "exploratory, performative, and playful" (n.p) identities to emerge. Wang (2014) refers to this as the "elastic self"; "the feeling that one's identity is malleable and involves the trying on of different identities that are beyond the realm of what would be considered normal displays of one's prescribed self" (ibid).[104] Adolescence and young adulthood is a period of transition and transformation (Zittoun 2006), "more of a process than a state" (Jenkins 2003, ix), and while the "prescribed self is composed of identities that are dictated by one's social structural categories… emerg[ing] out of existing social ties… the elastic self emerges out of new ties which creates informal modes of interaction" (Wang 2013b, n.p). Interacting with unknown others, people they do not know offline, liberates young people to experiment with different identities, without having to commit to just one, and with less risk of being socially shamed (ibid). Such interactions, Wang (2013b) argues, are transforming youth relationships into "substitutive systems of emotional support" (n.p). As I will

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[103] Livingstone (2007) notes the way in which bedrooms display not only current interests, but also previous ones which together tell the story of one's development.
[104] See also: Polak (2007).

next go on to discuss, links can be made here with fangirls' performance of affect and forms of emotional expression that are defining elements of the performative fangirl identity as is manifest on Tumblr.

Using popular culture as a "vehicle for emotional expression" (Wang 2013c), Tumblr is a space in which one is able to play with and explore identity, in all its guises and multiplicities (including their fan identity), without having to necessarily comply with, or be confined by, the prescribed self and the socially marginalised position of being young and female. Yet, rather than distance themselves from a gendered fan identity, in what follows I argue the performance and articulation of fandom seen by *iCarly* fans' on Tumblr—specifically its intense emotionality and hyperbolic language—closely mimics and (linguistically) writes in to being the physicality and embodied performance of the fangirl archetype. That is, fangirl performances in public spaces typically depicted in the media, and for which girl fans are routinely pathologised. Sarah Baker (2003) notes that female fandom is most often described and devalued with reference to its physicality, and I would add, emotionality. Online, the distinct ways in which Tumblr fangirls express themselves, both their collective identity and individuality, appears to capture if not exaggerate this very physicality and emotionality. This signals to others their emotional investment in the fannish object and has created not only a 'speech community' (Baym 1993) and communal feeling (Cavicchi 1998), but a fangirl culture of their own that has come to define Tumblr as a fan space.

'Mimetic Language' and Fangirl as 'Discourse': A (Linguistically) Performative Identity

Having argued that Tumblr can be understood as constituting a fangirl space, in this section I explore some of the characteristics of the fangirl performance. In Chapter Two I considered the ways in which a (community 'approved') fangirl mode was performed and articulated via shared reading practices and interpretive strategies. In this chapter, I am concerned with a fangirl performance that is reified linguistically and which itself, through a form of "performative writing" (Pollock 1998) that I refer to here as 'mimetic language' (emotional coding of language), belies an affective connection. Primarily young female fans have been, and continue to be, described and

discredited for their public displays of 'hysteria' (Bode 2010; Click 2009); a performance of affect that can be seen physically (shaking, crying) and heard audibly (screaming). In online spaces, where fans connect and communicate with each other, the body is absent from view[105] and speech inaudible, and such displays would seem to be rendered invisible, silent, and fannish affect thus more difficult to identify. Conversely, in this section I argue that, despite not having the benefit of vision, the shared language used by fangirls writes the body and affective performances in to being, making not only what cannot be seen visible, and what cannot be heard audible, but also making distinct a gendered fan identity by replicating the physicality and emotionality of female fans linguistically.

Contrary to early claims that in cyberspace one would be liberated from gender, "forsak[ing] both body and place and becom[ing] a thing of words alone" (Rushkoff cited in Bury 2005, 3), gender matters a great deal online (Bury 2005) and is performed through the ways people communicate (Baym 2010; Herring 1996b). Building on Judith Butler's (1990) statement that, "gender is an effect rather than the cause of "words, actions and gestures" (136), Rhiannon Bury (2005) suggests:

> that gender performance is not just about ways of walking but ways of talking. It is not only what I do that makes me recognisable as a woman but what I say and how I say it. In an online context, the body continues to signify gender intelligibility linguistically. Language in this sense is the linchpin that connects bodies to their online identities (8).

Taking this point forward, I argue that as language connects gender to an online identity, it also connects to a distinct fannish identity; one which mimics, through language, an embodied fangirl performance as it is most commonly understood and represented. To paraphrase Bury, it is not only what one says that makes one recognisable as a fan (e.g. a direct statement of "I am a fan" or demonstrating knowledge of the fan object), but how one says it, and makes clear their fannish, affective investment. Screaming is understood as a complex expression of individualism and collectivity, a way to signal to others the importance of the fannish object for themselves, and reinforce their place in a group that shares a common identity (Janning 2014). Likewise, language can also mark one's 'insider status' and

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[105] Increasingly however, younger fans especially are sharing 'selfies' on Tumblr, thus making the body visible.

belonging to a particular online fan culture, as well as I argue, communicate emotions despite the medium's lack of an emotional register. In Baym's terms (2010), language creates "a social context akin to community" (77), and within 'speech communities' people "share ways of speaking that capture the meanings that are important to them and the logics that underlie their common sensibilities" (ibid). Shared language functions to "delineate the boundaries of the community, to unify its members, and to exclude others" (Jankowski 2006, 64) who may not understand its meaning or appropriate usage. One such example is 'fangirl speak'.[106]

The Internet itself appears to have much to say about fangirls', particularly Tumblr fangirls' use of language. A search on Google for 'fangirl speak' results in a range of how-to guides intended to demystify words and phrases used in the fangirl vernacular. In fan research, Eden Lackner et al. (2006) have noted the range of "textual representations of nonverbal responses" used by fans in the context of offering feedback to works of fanfiction, such as "*incoherency* *runs into walls banging head against stuff*" (202). Building on the work of Bury (2005), as above, Karen Healey (2009) has examined the linguistic markers of female fanspaces in comics fandom, focusing primarily on the names of the communities and briefly attending to the stereotypical fangirl's use of 'netspeak'. Incidentally, in Healey's (2009) study such language was considered by some as disingenuous, unintilligent, and an "affectation", despite the fan who used it insisting it was a "genuine expression of self" (159). Aside from these exceptions, and examples of fan language in direct quotation in much literature, to my knowledge scholarship thus far has not theorised or analysed in detail the distinct ways in which fans, particularly Tumblr fans, use language to express emotion or fannish investment. While Romano (2013a) claims fandom has always manipulated language in order to discuss what it loves, Tumblr specifically has "spawned an enormous culture built around intense emotion expressed in specific ways" (n.p), and it therefore demands further interrogation in the context of fangirl performances.

While the final two sections of this chapter focus on fans' reflections on their becoming fans, fannish development, and the significance of fandom to their lives, I

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[106] Also known as 'Tumblr Speak', although much of Tumblr's language originated in spaces such as 4Chan and LiveJournal and since evolved and popularised.

first consider how they linguistically perform their fandom in order to identify themselves as such, and communicate to others their belonging in the group. While in person, fans may display their fandom physically by clapping, screaming, crying, jumping, and any number of physical or emotional actions, I am interested in exploring here how these behaviours can be seen to translate to an online setting. This also offers an opportunity to explore how fans communicate their investment and belonging outside of their reading and interpretive strategies as discussed in Chapter Two, or explicitly stating it as they did on Blogspot in Chapter Three, and in parts of the Tumblr tag discussed here later. Drawing on examples from the 13 days challenge, I focus in this section on what I refer to as 'mimetic language': that which seeks to imitate, represent, or lay claim to embodied fannish affect,[107] how this can constitute a fangirl identity and performance thereof, and the ways in which this functions to signify a shared fannish identity. Drawing on James Paul Gee's (1990) notion of 'Discourse' with a big 'D', I also argue that the fangirl identity as it is performed online is more than just language, but is rather a way of being; a combination of words, meanings, values, and gestures that through 'mimetic language' is made visible.

Fangirl as 'Discourse'

In *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, Gee (1990) distinguishes between discourse with a small 'd', used to refer to "connected stretches of language that make sense" (142) such as conversations and stories, and 'Discourse' with a big 'D' which is "always more than just language" (ibid). Discourses, with a capital 'D' "are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (ibid). In this way then, discourse with a small 'd' is also part of 'Discourses'. 'Discourses' function as a way to display membership in a group or social network that is comprised of people who coalesce around a common set of interests and activities. Through words and actions, values and beliefs, in addition to physical markers such as clothing and style one can indicate a shared (performative) identity that others will recognise; hence Gee (1990) refers to 'Discourses' as comprising an "identity kit" (142). Discourses are also intrinsically ideological: "One must speak and act, and at least appear to think and feel,

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[107] This concept is therefore different to Anna Gibbs' (2010) notion of "mimetic expression" as a "corporeally based form of imitation" in which affect plays a central part, such as one mimicking an other's facial expressions or movements (186).

in terms of these values and viewpoints while being in the Discourse, otherwise one doesn't count as being in it" (144). Although language (linguistic markers) is the most obvious d/Discourse when examining fan interaction online (Healey 2009), the mimetic nature of language used by fangirls works to encapsulate more than just shared feelings, values, and attitudes; it is also a performance of fan identity and affect, of an embodied action that indicates an emotional response that is hyperbolic and 'excessive'. It indicates to others a fangirl sensibility, as well as constituting a fangirl performance in the absence of physical or visual markers that would otherwise signify one *as* a fangirl (stereotypically young, female, loud, 'frenzied', and emotional). Through its mimetic qualities, as I will turn to now, the use of language comes to represent fangirl as Discourse *beyond* language; that is, a way of being, acting, thinking, and feeling as a fan(girl).

'Mimetic Language' and Empowering Emotion

Mimesis holds a wide range of meanings and has been considered across a variety of disciplines. In Michael Taussig's (1993) definition, mimesis is "the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other" (xiii). Drawing on the character and power of the original, the copy, imitation, or representation assumes through its "sensuous fidelity" (ibid, 16) some of the character and power of that which it is a copy. What I am referring to here as 'mimetic language' aims to convey an impression of, or directly represents an 'authentic' physical action, gesture, bodily feeling, emotion or psychological state, or expression (as opposed to onomatopoeia which imitates a sound). It is a visual language, making emotions visible through GIFs, images, and 'visually stylised texts'[108] (Baheri 2013, n.p), and which may offer some insight into how a person feels. As emotion is central to the experience of fandom (Duffett 2013; Sandvoss 2005), mimetic language would seem of particular resonance for fans communicating online. Moreover, as described in the previous section, Tumblr is a particularly visual media environment, and thus it is unsurprising it would develop (or build on that which came before) its own visual vocabulary to match.

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[108] E.g. unconventional spacing or repetition of letters, usage of capitals or punctuation marks.

In the context of fangirls' use of mimetic language, it functions as a linguistic representation of behaviours commonly associated with female fans in public spaces, and has expanded to account for behaviours more particular to online fandom that similarly hold affect at their core. While to some extent embodied displays of affect stand-in for language in physical spaces, affective language seems to stand-in for and mimic embodied behaviours in virtual spaces. Through words, images, punctuation, and oft-repeated phrases, mimetic language writes into being screams, facial expressions, bodily sensations, and visible emotions such as crying. As a form of "performative writing" (Pollock 1998), it is "evocative…operat[ing] metaphorically to render absence present… evoking worlds that are otherwise intantigible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight" (ibid, 80). Thus, rather than distance themselves from the much maligned, stereotypical image of a crowd of 'hysterical' (female) fans, fans online can be seen to represent, express, and capture the physicality and emotionality of their responses to the fannish object through their use of language; essentially turning emotional expression into a shibboleth.

 As fangirl 'hysteria' is typically characterised by its seeming lack of control; a mass of girls are feared uncontrollable, and considered powerless over the desires and emotions that control them (Bury 2005; Herrmann 2008), it seems pertinent here that fans choose to use such emotive, mimetic language. Online, girls can choose the manner through which they express themselves, they have control over their self-presentation (boyd 2006; 2008; Stern 2002) and they can "explore impression management" (boyd 2006, n.p). Young female fans are not commonly attributed power (of almost any kind) and routinely denied autonomy and agency with regard to their interests (girls as homogenous mass of cultural dupes) and responses (ruled by their hormones and unrequited sexual desires). As noted throughout this thesis, fangirls are rarely represented or discussed in popular media culture without reference to their 'excessively' emotional expression of fandom, as well as its physicality. Such displays are not only systematically devalued in contemporary society (Baker 2003; Bode 2010; Ehrenreich et al. 1992), but the repetitive nature of these representations also perpetuates the construction of emotion as somehow inherently 'feminine' and thus deviant, and gives credence to the perception that girls have no mastery over the overwhelming power of their (seen as trivial) emotions or 'unruly' sexuality.

Conversely, fangirls online would seem to challenge these assumptions, if only that they have control enough to express their emotional responses in words and share them with others. More than that, Baheri (2013) claims that in the world of internet writing, rather than being restricted to existing language, women are creating language and socialising it while dominating every major social network. On Tumblr, fans celebrate their affect through language, perhaps even further exaggerate it, and build relationships and communities around it. In a way, it is somewhat of an assumed requirement in order to find membership in a community, to meaningfully participate, and to convey to others their devotion to fandom and the fannish object.

While feelings and emotions continue to be problematically 'feminised' and hence devalued, as Tumblr user Notbecauseofvictories (2013)[109] states they are attributed power online:

> on Tumblr, emotion is linked to power. Explicitly so. Feels can kill, feels can hurt… Feels are the currency with which you buy your right to fannishness. Our reaction to a society that dismisses emotion as baseless is to crank that shit up to eleven and make it the gate through which you must pass to enter the community. We've *weaponized*[110] emotion (original emphasis).

Feminist Luce Irigaray (1985) uses the term 'mimesis' to refer to a resistant act in which women unfaithfully imitate gendered stereotypes about themselves in order to undermine them. Thus, for instance, if women are seen as illogically emotional, women would speak logically and unemotionally about this stereotypical view. On Tumblr, the reverse appears to be at play. Rather than countering the view that fans are emotional, that emotions are baseless, and to be emotional is to be infantile, powerless, 'feminine', deviant; emotions are instead reaffirmed, exaggerated, and attributed power. Such an approach to emotion has a potentially feminist edge to it, challenging the notion that *being* emotional is to be powerless or illogical, that discussions or opinions based on emotions are invalid; a notion that has historically been, and continues to be, used to dismiss or silence women. Indeed, both Kristina Busse (2007c) and Alexis Lothian (2008) have begun to consider the empowering,

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[109] Notbecauseofvictories. 2013. *Tumblr*, 22 February.

[110] In correspondence with Notbecauseofvictories they explained that at the time of writing in 2013, feminist ideas about 'weaponised femininity' and the 'deadly feminine' were extremely popular on Tumblr. Since then, there has been a push back on this idea of 'weaponising' due to it potentially perpetuating a narrow or harmful definition of femininity, and concerns about the violent connotations of the term. While acknowledging that it is an imperfect term, I would argue that the concept goes some way to both encapsulate the power that is accorded to emotion on Tumblr, and to reflect the progressive nature of feminist thought and discussion within this space.

potentially political implications of shared affect, in particular for women embracing their emotional responses, "who let their inner teenage girl out to play in fandom [having] stridently disavowed such emotional behaviour as a trapping of stereotypical femininity" (Lothian, n.p). To validate emotion, attribute them power, and to own them, give voice to them, rather than deny them because as 'feminine' they are devalued, something to be concealed or ashamed of, fans are finding power in emotional expression such that it is an integral part of engaging in a fan community. Through the use of mimetic language, examples that I will now discuss, fans have found ways in which to imitate, as faithfully as language (and imagery) will allow, the stereotype which seeks to undermine them and reclaimed it as powerful.

Squee and Fangirling Online

The fangirl 'squee', meaning to squeal with glee as a combination of the two words, is a catch-all term for the sound and feeling of excitement. While it can invoke an image of someone literally screaming at their computer screen, it is often represented in GIFs and images tagged or associated with 'fangirling'. In the challenge, a number of fans chose the scene in the *iCarly* episode 'iGo One Direction' (5.02) in which Gibby meets and 'fangirls' over One Direction, as their favourite Gibby moment, thus underlining the non-essentialist use of the term. The GIF created of this moment (Figure 4.1) is very similar to the many 'squee' and 'fangirling' GIF memes that circulate on Tumblr.

Figure 4.1: Gibby fangirling

While fangirling is primarily understood to refer to a conspicuously physical manifestation of affect (e.g. hyperventilation), it can also be an internal, undetectable

response (Figure 4.2). Online activities such as "endless" blogging have also been included as a 'symptom' of fangirling, thus underlining the importance of, and reflecting, Tumblr culture (Figure 4.3).
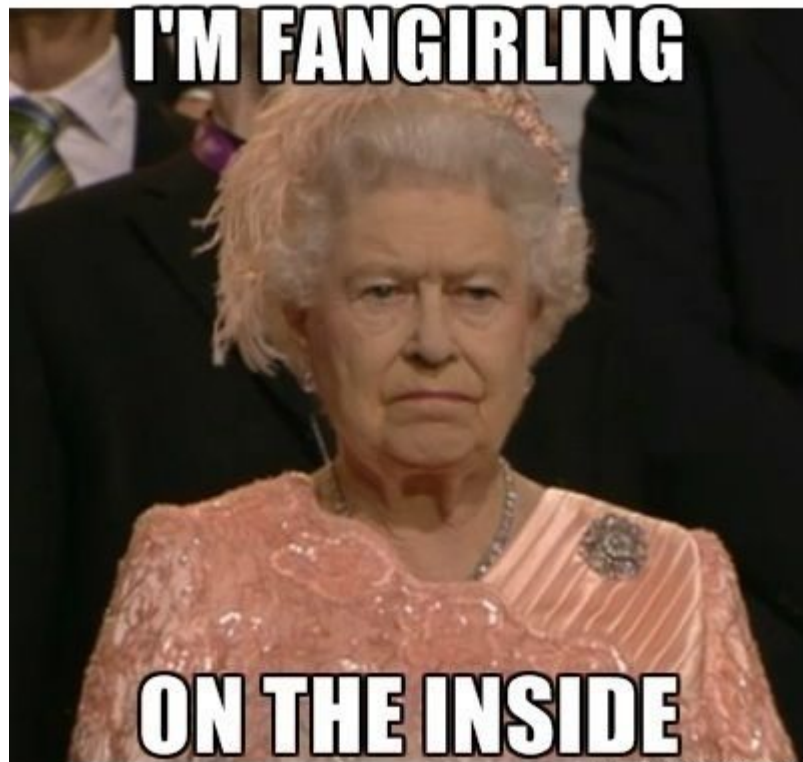

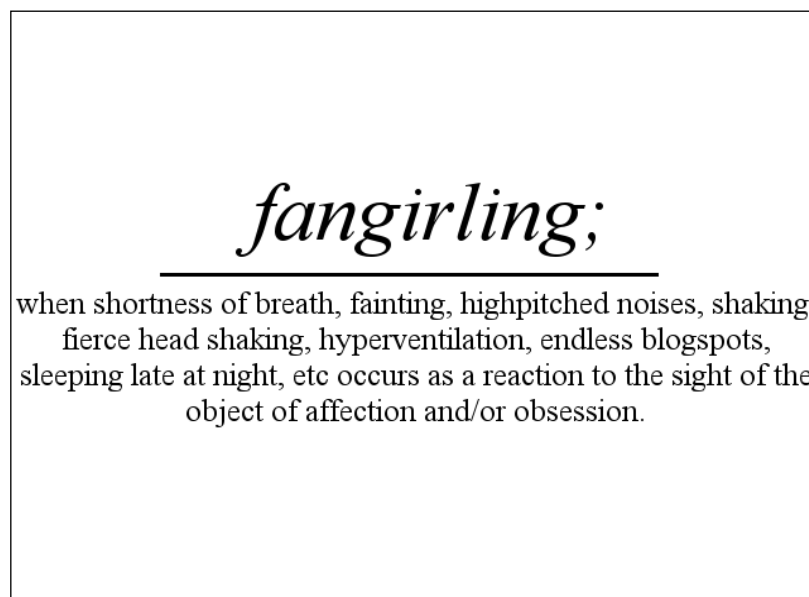**Figure 4.2:** Fangirling on the inside meme.

Figure 4.3: Fangirling activities.

Although the idea of "fangirling on the inside" may be intended as a play on, or reference to, the fact that physical embodiment is largely hidden from view online, the physicality of response is nevertheless relatively insignificant. Mimetic language is intended to capture a "presumed emotional response" (Edwards 2014, n.p); it does not need to be visibly/audibly evident as the implication is sufficient in communicating the significance of the feelings behind the symbolic physical act. The use of the word 'lol', to mean 'laughing out loud' is used by a number of *iCarly* fans in the tag. This is arguably a mimetic word since it refers to an action, invokes an image for the reader, and communicates that the writer is, or feels amused enough, to laugh out loud. Like squeeing or fangirling though, the writer may in fact be entirely silent with barely a smile registering on their face.

In the same vein, in the challenge, **TR3** (14/11/12) explained that a particular episode "gave me so many feels. I was in a sobbing mess", while **TR4** (13/11/12) simply ended a statement with "cRIES" and "SCREAMS". Of course, it is not possible to verify whether their emotions were manifested in these ways or whether the references are symbolic of the intensity of their emotions. Either way, it is made clear through their language choice that their emotional response was of significance and in this way, indicates to others their fannishness and investment. To some extent, the use of mimetic language resonates with Paul Booth's (2008) contention that what matters in online interaction is *not* the offline identity, but the online identities that the user depicts. The fan may not be squeeing, sobbing, or laughing out loud 'in real life', but their feelings are representative of, and equal to, these actions, and it is through hyperbolic mimetic language that the online fangirl self is depicted as, and assumed to be, (virtually) responding in these ways to the fannish object.

Keysmashing and the Power of 'Feels'

While the above examples of mimetic language function as linguistic representations of an action that are not visible online, the 'keysmash' represents and makes visible an action caused by an emotion. When intensely excited, the 'feels' are too much to handle, or one is beyond words or coherency, "asdfghjkl" is used to represent one smashing the computer keyboard; a "stylized verbal incoherence mirroring emotional incoherence" (McCulloch 2013, n.p). While it may be popularly understood as

Tumblr's shorthand to convey excitement (Figure 4.4), the emotions behind keysmashing are not usually named; indeed the point is that one is unable to articulate or identify exactly what it is they are feeling as it is a rush of many different feelings simultaneously. But, through this linguistic convention emotionality, regardless of kind, can be meaningfully and pragmatically conveyed.

Figure 4.4: Tumblr keyboard smash.

Feeling overwhelmed or lost for words, one could simply write "I am overwhelmed" or "I am speechless", but the 'keysmash' literally represents the inability to find the appropriate words through its composition of random letters that do not make sense as actual words. Indeed, mimetic language, as a form of 'performative writing' "does not describe, in a narrowly reportorial sense, an objectively verifiable event or process, but uses language like paint to create what is self-evidently a *version* of what was, what is, and/or what might be" (Pollock 1998, 80).

In the challenge, nine fans described their inability to find words, for example, **TR5** (14/11/12) tagged their post "#Words cannot describe my love and feels for this ship" as a justification of sorts for their post containing more images than words. Keysmashing was also present, for example, **TR6** (15/11/12) tagged their 'favourite ship' post: "#dhfbzhjdfkjsdnfisudjfnkjsdncksdbhvdjnnkcjdbvkjsdcnzkjsdnhdfbvsudfcnkdjvbfdjk #feels". While the order of letters in the 'classic' 'keysmash' follow those on a querty keyboard from left to right, an entirely more random combination of letters can also be used, which may convey even stronger feels since the typist is unable to even keyboard smash 'accurately'. Using such language functions then as a claim of

investment, a marker of one's fangirl sensibilities, and thus belonging to the community of which they are a part. It also works to signal one's fangirl capital, not just in its use as a signifier of one's fannishness and affective investment, but also as a form of esoteric knowledge. To the uninitiated, the sequence of seemingly random letters would not necessarily indicate an emotional response on the part of the writer; at worst it may communicate unintelligence, while at best (though equally failing in conveying meaning) it may merely appear as a nonsensical sequence of random letters. 'Fangirl speak' is thus an exclusionary discourse; through shared understanding and correct usage, it identifies those of a common identity with specialist knowledge and excludes those who do not, thereby defining the community's boundaries. Before I turn to fans' journeys into *iCarly* fandom, and the importance of the fan community to their identification and pleasures as fans, I wish to explore one final example of a shared language that constructs one's identity as a fangirl and secures one's belonging and capital within fandom.

The Language of GIFs and 'GIF-fing' as Shipping Practice

Another way that fans' emotional engagements and 'insider' status can be performed and understood is through the use, creation, and circulation of GIFs. An acronym for Graphic Interchange Format, GIFs are short moving image files, offering a snapshot of only three or four seconds of video that play on an endless loop.[111] GIFs are used extensively on Tumblr, particularly in fan communities and especially in the challenge. Yet despite their importance in fandom (and internet culture more broadly), fan scholarship has so far overlooked this particular practice.[112] I contend that GIFS have come to form their very own language of sorts, used often to express, through mimicry or representation, a feeling or action, akin to that of the keysmash. For example, the "facepalm" (Fig. 4.6) may be used to indicate frustration, embarrassment, or disappointment.

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[111] See: Cheese (2013) for the history of the GIF and its relationship to Tumblr.
[112] Paul Booth (2008) has noted however, that fans are increasingly treating source texts not as objects, but as "practices" (517), and the popularity of GIFs would seem to reflect this trend.

Figure 4.5: *iCarly* facepalm GIF.

Arguably, the use of a GIF as a comment image further highlights the emotion being conveyed without the use of words, in a similar way to emoticons or emojis. GIFS made from the fannish source text (as above), are sometimes used as a reaction or comment image, i.e. "content being used as communication in reaction to content" (Cheese 2013, n.p). Indeed, **TR7** (13/11/12) used the facepalm GIF to express their reaction to an unexpected Seddie kiss which was a catalyst in their becoming-a-fan (Figure 4.6). Tracing the development of their fandom with the Seddie relationship, **TR7** suggests that their involvement in fandom was informed, sustained, and intensified by their interest in this ship.

1. When/why did you start watching?

I started out not really caring for it up until the second season or so. The thing that made me jump in was:

WAT.

I didn't actually understand anything about anything then. so I was there like, 'wait, aren't they supposed to hate each other?'

but yeah, I started actually watching it after that. then I strayed away, got distracted, did my own thing for a while..

BUT THEN.

and I've been this huge blob of messy feels ever since.

Figure 4.6: TR7's Tumblr post (day one).

As well as a form of mimetic language, GIFs are a form of play or fannish practice that has particular importance within shipping communities. GIFs depicting romantic moments between *iCarly* characters were thus used throughout the challenge. Just as shipping is a way of understanding, reading, and interpreting a text and thus a component of the fangirl Discourse, so too is 'GIF-fing' (making GIFs). GIFs resemble a form of 'participatory spectatorship' (Murray 1999), with fans' pleasure located in the joint construction and collective meaning making of the narrative**.** Meaning is not simply "taken", but formed by the fan community, and in the process,

the program text becomes "more than a TV show: it is now a deliberate fan-communion across media" (Booth 2008, 517). Significant moments from the text, based precisely on a shared reading or understanding of it—often key moments of interaction between shipped characters—are elevated above, and isolated from the rest of the text, and captured in the content of the GIF. The creation and circulation of GIFS thus play a role in inspiring shared 'squee' and facilitating discussion around ships. As a centrepiece of Tumblr fandom, arguably the most widely circulated media form on the platform, GIFS also reflect the shared values, beliefs, ways of seeing, being, and feeling that comprise a fangirl Discourse.

The process of, and pleasures offered in GIF-fing can be understood to have its roots in vidding (fan videos), a practice traditionally associated with women (Coppa 2009). Like 'GIF-fing', vidding involves "a selective seeing, or seeing in parts (ibid, 109-10) that "requires obsessive re-watching as well as the ability to invest certain moments with meaning and separate these parts from the whole" (110). Indeed, as part of their answer for "favourite ship", **TR8** (15/11/12) shared a GIF (Figure 4.7) that offers a condensed history of Seddie moments throughout the entirety of the show that have been extracted from the whole and invested with particular meaning for shippers.

Figure 4.7: Seddie GIF.

TR2 (15/11/12)**,** one of two self-confessed GIF creators taking part in the challenge spoke to this notion of close, directed reading and described the affective process of making these fan works:

iKiss makes me want to cry every time I watch it. I went slightly hysterical last night and dumped a bunch of feels on Twitter when I was capping it to make the gifs because I never watched it in frames before. When I watch things in frames I tend to notice things more clearly (**TR2**).

In isolating relatively subtle moments by 'GIF-fing', they may come to hold greater significance than was perhaps intended in their original context; not only for fans that view them online, but particularly for the GIF creators, such as **TR2.**

Lisa Bode (2010) notes that the devaluation of teen girl viewing is largely based on the perception of it as uncritically engaged and intensely affective. Although Bode does not pursue potential links between these two perceptions, I would argue that girls are likely considered uncritically engaged by *virtue* of their intensely affective viewing, as though affect itself impairs girls' critical abilities. Shipping is concerned with the construction of a romantic narrative, and thus largely dismissed as frivolous and 'feminine', yet GIF making (for shipping purposes or not) showcases fans' critical engagement with the source text as well as their technical capabilities—neither of which are compromised by their affective sensibilities and interest in romantic discourses. Through GIFs, *iCarly* fans are constructing a supplementary and romantically infused narrative, and this technical practice demands recognition as a skill, and one that works someway to challenge common perceptions of girls' fandom as passive or uncritical. It also challenges their traditional construction as consumers rather than producers, and hence highlights girls' bedroom cultures as 'sites of cultural production' (Kearney 2007).

I have argued above that the reclamation and empowerment of emotion through affective language performances can be understood as a form of feminist resistance to the feminisation and devaluation of emotion. I have also argued that it works to counter the 'out of control' fangirl stereotype as fans choose to use such language, and they can be understood to have control enough in order to express their emotional responses in words and share them online. In the following example of a becoming-a-fan narrative, the way in which individual agency is carefully maintained throughout the description of this process of 'becoming' can be understood in a similar way. This is significant in illustrating that while Tumblr may be a relatively safe space for fangirls' emotional expression, there is still an imperative to impression manage

(Goffman 1959; see Chapter Three) "so as not to be consistent with undesired identity images—those things that the individual does not want to be" (Leary and Kowalski 1990, 40-41) or be seen *as*. In this context, the image fans can be understood to be attempting to distance from is that of the irrational, conformist fangirl who follows the crowd (Ehrenreich 1992).

Becoming Fans and Journeying into Fandom

'Becoming-a-fan' stories have been largely overlooked in fan studies (Cavicchi 1998, Duffett 2013; Hills 2014), with 'fan' often considered "a consumer category into which someone simply falls or does not fall" (Cavicchi 1998, 41), and fandom studied as a "pre-existent, lived identity" (Hills 2014, 9). Yet, by not attending to "the process, development and… fluidity of being a… fan" (Crawford 2004, 38 cited in Hills 2014, 9), "fandom partially loses its lived connection with a 'narrative of the self' (Giddens 1991: 76)" (Hills 2014, 9). For many fans, becoming a fan is an important moment in their lives, a point at which "everything changed" (Cavicchi 1998, 59), transforming one's attitudes to the self and others (Meggers 2012), as well as "one's identity, daily activities, and life trajectories" (Harrington and Bielby 2010b, 2.2).

In this section of the chapter, I respond to this call as I consider *iCarly* Tumblr fans' becoming-a-fan-narratives and journeys into fandom. Exploring becoming-a-fan narratives, and processes of development and transformation in relation to young fans, may be especially pertinent given that "youth can be seen as a catalysing period of revision, or active creation of… a personal culture" (Zittoun 2006, 8), one marked by identity construction and exploration, "multiple ruptures and transitions, changes within and of spheres of experience" (ibid). Becoming fans of *iCarly* and discovering Tumblr fandom was one such change within the spheres of experience in the fans under study here, and seemingly an important part in the construction of a 'personal culture'; a unique culmination of the shared meanings attached to objects that become somewhat central to the person (ibid). In what follows I will briefly examine how 'becoming-a-fan stories' (Cavicchi 1998) have been discussed in the literature thus far and address my use of key terms and concepts that will be used in the remainder of this chapter.

Transformation Narratives and 'Becoming-Fan' as Process

Fandom has been compared to religion by a number of scholars (Cavicchi 1998; Duffett 2013; Ehrenreich et al. 1992; Hills 2002; 2006), and becoming a fan to a moment of religious "conversion" (Cavicchi 1998, 59). Both may be similar in language and in form as Sandvoss (2005) notes: the "regular and repeated consumption" (7) of a fan object resembles a form of 'devotion', and both hold a particularly intense emotional significance (61). However, the use of religious terminology in relation to fans has also been considered problematic.[113] For Jenkins (2006d), the difficulties revolve around the etymology of the word 'fan', derived from 'fanaticus', which implies excessive or false worship (17).[114] Since these connotations are already stuck to 'fan', Jenkins argues they are made worse by religious analogies. Although four fans in the challenge referred to their ritualised viewing during a period of growing fannishness as watching "religiously", like Jenkins, I do not wish to maintain the comparison here or draw on religious analogies such as 'conversion'. Not only do I agree there is potential to pathologise fans, in regard to the younger fans I discuss here I would also argue it is more useful to conceptualise fans' 'becoming' as a process of productive transformation. Notions of 'transformation' are particularly apt for this discussion since fans' transformative experiences largely coincided with transition processes around adolescence (Bailey 2005; Meggers 2012; Zittoun 2006). Moreover, conceptualising their 'becoming' in this way works to frame the final section of this chapter, whereby I attend to fans' personal experience narratives as they reflect on their journeys thus far, and account for the ways in which their fannish experiences have influenced their lives.

Zittoun (2006) suggests, specifically in relation to young people, that (fan) 'conversion' instead resembles a productive self-transformation, with the symbolic resource (the fan object) used generatively for growth and self-development during a period of transition. Rather than a single moment that radically and immediately changes everything that follows, becoming a fan is an evolving process or journey, with the symbolic object functioning as a facilitator in identity development over time. There may be a particular moment one can identify as that which began their journey, but it is also not a momentary, complete, or contained transformation. The moment of

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[113] See: Duffett (2013); Hills (2002); Hills in Jenkins (2006d); Sandvoss (2005).
[114] See also: Jenkins (1992); Staiger (2005).

becoming is not an end, rather it is the catalyst for subsequent growth and self-development; it is the beginning of a longer evolving process of transformation and discovery. In the remainder of this chapter, it is the ensuing process *after* the moment of 'becoming'—the *process* of transformation—that I am concerned with. Zittoun's work regarding young peoples' use of 'symbolic resources' to help work through transitions/ruptures in their lives will be discussed more precisely in the context of *iCarly* fans' goodbye posts, in the final section of this chapter.

From the responses to the first question of the challenge, "When/why did you start watching?" (35 out of 45 answered), it is clear that *iCarly*/fandom marked a number of firsts: "the first time I ever screamed at a TV" (**TR9**, 12/11/12) and "the first character I fell in love with" (**TR9**, 13/11/12), "My first fandom, OTP while knowing what shipping is, first real fangirling moment, first heartbreak. (**TR10**, 23/11/14), and "my first ship where I actually got somewhat involved in fandom (**TR2**, 15/11/12). *iCarly* fandom can thus be considered a 'gateway fandom' (see Introduction). The majority of the narratives (becoming-a-fan and goodbye narratives) explored in the remainder of this chapter were thus written by first-time fans; their first time identifying as a fan of any object, and their first experience participating in a fan community. For some, their formative fannish experience was a transformative one considered life changing, one potentially leading to a longer process of change or development. As **TR9** (14/11/12) explained:

> if I never watched iCarly then I would have never became a fangirl. (It's the little things that can change your life in a big way.) […] I mean, now that I know about fandoms I can't really go back to forgetting all about them and stop obsessing over TV shows and get overly attached to it.

Like others, **TR9** implied that fandom was now a way of life; they couldn't revert back to how they were before they discovered fandom. Moreover in this case, becoming a fan had shaped their identity—they had become a fangirl—and *iCarly* had functioned as a catalyst for this transformation.

Yet if becoming a fan is not an instant conversion but rather a (transformative) process, in what ways might this process be described, and how might fans position themselves in this narrative? How might one legitimise themselves as a fan and negotiate a space whereby they can claim a fangirl identity without being 'too much',

that is, not a fangirl stereotype? In what follows I focus on one fans' account of their journey into fandom in order to explore these questions. Likely because of the structure of the first question, that is, asking how or why one came to watch *iCarly*, rather than directly asking how one became a fan, most fans did not describe their journeys into fandom. In fact, most fans answered the question literally, explaining for example: where they were when they first accidentally caught an episode, or that they had always watched Nickelodeon because of their age (13); that they recognised the actors from Schneider's previous shows or they had grown up with Schneider sitcoms (8); or they were introduced by a friend (4). The following example was therefore the most pertinent for this chapter, and in providing a productive counterpoint to the preceding section.

Maintaining Agency and Defying Fangirl Stereotypes

While it may appear to be relatively safe or acceptable to refer to oneself as a fangirl in the space of Tumblr as **TR9** (14/11/12) and several others did, fan accounts produced for this challenge do not exist in a vacuum. It is more than likely that challenge participants were aware of the devalued status of fangirls and fangirl stereotypes. Although not evident in challenge answers, fangirl policing does occur on Tumblr and most, if not all, fans taking part were aware of the controversy surrounding 'iStart a Fan War' (iSAFW; see Chapter Three). Thus, the imperative to distinguish oneself from fangirl stereotypes (even while referring to oneself as a fangirl) and legitimise oneself as a fan would still be high in this context, especially as the show was nearing its end. The self-narratives written for the challenge would seem to be a prime opportunity for fans to create certain impressions, to present oneself in a 'favourable light' (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 33), and attempt to influence the impressions that others may have of them.

As I suggested earlier, the accounts produced for the challenge are highly performative. Hills (2005c) argues that "pleasure-as-performative is always a cultural act, an articulation of identity" (ix) and further, that the performative is always "doing something as opposed to just saying something" (Austin 1976 cited in ibid, x). Building on Barbara Crowther's (1999) work on girls' diary-writing as performance, Stern (2002) suggests that the performative aspect of girls' homepages should be

considered, stating "it seems somewhat unwise to place absolute faith in these documents' testimonial power" (347). Likewise, Hills argues that "performative utterances are not just statements about the world that could be described as 'true' or otherwise… instead they achieve outcomes, or 'do something' (x). In the following example, I suggest that the performative utterance can be understood to be negotiating the stereotype of the conformist fangirl by carefully maintaining individual agency throughout. At the same time, this example also serves to illustrate fangirls' particular investment in a community (Busse 2007a; 2007b; 2007c), such that it may be intrinsic to how one understands themselves as a fan. Whilst the construction of individual agency—or 'authentic individuality', "performed through imperviousness to social influence" (Kanai 2015, n.p)—may seem to be in conflict with positioning oneself as 'authentically' belonging to a community, this can be understood as a critical balancing act in their performance between appearing 'too much' or 'not enough' fangirl.

Identifiying as a 'casual' viewer since *iCarly* began, **TR10** (11/11/12) claimed they did not get really interested until two years after the show first aired. Stumbling across an episode re-run one sleepless night they were reminded of Seddie's first kiss, which promoted them to search for it on Youtube. They watched old episodes and looked up the broadcast schedule to watch new ones, thus intensifying their viewing practices and regularly engaging with the fan object. While they researched on Wikipedia and watched episodes on YouTube, they made it clear that they did not otherwise engage in fan spaces. At this early point in their narrative they appear keen to point out that, although they hadn't joined fandom yet, they "remember shipping Sam and Freddie", even though they "never really knew about shipping or ship names". In this way then, they suggest that they were shipping independently, before they were even aware that this is what other fans in fandom were also doing. Like **TR10**, **TR11** (13/11/12) also explained they were "a Seddie shipper from the start", although they found this experience confusing: "I remember… being excited in a way I couldn't understand".

Curious about what "Seddie" meant, **TR10** (11/11/12) then proceeds to detail two forums they began to frequent at the beginning of their journey into fandom. They identify this as the moment when they "really started to fall for the show", as they learnt from other fans in the forum "how different it was from any other kids show

and how GREAT each character was". Again, **TR10** made clear that they weren't part of fandom yet, but they positioned their lurking in fan spaces as a form of education: they learnt how other fans valued the show, which in turn, heightened their own enjoyment. This stands in stark contrast to the way in which **TR12** (13/11/12) positioned their first encounter with fandom, they write:

> One day I randomly found the [Seddie] forum […] Anyway the thread was AWESOME […] The fandom immediately pulled me in. That first night I found the board, I read EVERY PAGE of the iOMG thread (and there were over 300), I don't know how on Earth I did that...but obviously everyone's excitement was that contagious. :)

While **TR12** characterised their journey into *iCarly* fandom as a random occurrence,[115] a spontaneous, irresistible, almost unstoppable happening as they were swept up by other fans' excitement, **TR10** positioned their journey as a longer process of rational discovery. Not only were they in full control of the process, visiting numerous places before settling in Tumblr, but they sought to learn and observe how fandom, and Seddie shippers in particular, functioned. This positioning of their journey as a learning experience also stands in contrast to **TR11** (13/11/12) who was the only other fan in the challenge to write an account of this nature. Similarly curious about Seddie, the first place they visited online was fanfiction.net to look at *iCarly* fanfiction, yet the way they described their orientation into fandom was as "being corrupted by the strange fandom interpretations". It seems however that the "strange interpretations" did not deter them as they explained they were "pretty hooked" from that moment, and since they didn't refer to any other forums, it seems as though their journey into fandom was more spontaneous than that of **TR10**.

TR10 (11/11/12) continued to explain that reading through the pages of the forum helped them "see all the different layers of each character", and thus their understanding of the text was particularly enriched via engagement with a fan community, even if they did not understand themselves as 'belonging' to the fandom at that point since they only 'lurked'. While Busse (2007b) suggests that lurkers often imagine themselves part of the community, for **TR10**, it seems participation was crucial to understanding themselves as a fan and belonging to a fandom. **TR10** goes

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[115] Drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, Hills (2014) refers to the random appearance of would-be fan objects that "unexpectedly interlock with self-experience" as 'aleatory objects' (13).

on to describe the process by which they began to incorporate fandom into their everyday life, consuming multiple fan texts across a range of online spaces and mediums, rather than concentrated in one specific location. Although they describe their transition into fandom as gradual, it was punctuated by certain key moments:

> iSAFW was the first fangirling moment I had with the fandom (without actually being a part in the fandom yet). I got to see their reactions to the promo, and their disappointment to the episode (**TR10**).

Through this they likely learnt how other fans performed their affective investment online, and potentially some of the linguistic markers as discussed earlier in the chapter. Although they were fangirling with other fans, they were still not swept up or "pulled in" in the same way that **TR12** (13/11/12) described. Indeed, they claimed they didn't make an account on the forum, nor fangirl with other fans until four episodes later and it was after that, during "the LONG wait for the following episode", that they discovered *iCarly* fandom on Tumblr.

Once their journey arrives at Tumblr, **TR10** (11/11/12) ends their post, thus potentially suggesting that Tumblr was the final 'destination'. **TR10**'s early viewing practices would seem to define them as a fan according to Sandvoss' (2005) conception—"regular, emotionally involved consumption" (8). However, the 'transformative' moment for **TR10** appeared to be, not alone during the 'needing to know everything' and intense exploration stage Cavicchi (1998) describes, but the moment they made an account on the forum, "fangirled" with the other fans, and created a Tumblr blog. While **TR10** did not explicitly refer to themselves as a 'fan' at any point in the post, the narrative constructed continually builds up to the moment when they are able to claim that they were a member of fandom, thereby suggesting that was the defining moment at which they became, or would identify themselves as becoming a 'fan'. Engaging with other fans, fangirling with other fans, appears then intrinsic to their understanding of what constitutes, and what it means to be a fan, as well as an identified central pleasure of their fandom.

Yet while **TR10**'s (11/11/12) narrative suggests that a community of fans was of particular importance, what the structure of their account seems to be "doing" is highlighting individual agency. Their utterances, taken together, can be understood as

"implicit performatives" (Austin 1976 cited in Hills 2005c, x) that seek to position them as an active, individual agent, one that made informed rational decisions about where and when to participate, and learnt about the ways of fandom before jumping in as a novice with only shallow understanding. Unlike **TR12** (13/11/12), they suggest they weren't pulled in to fandom immediately via other fans' contagious enthusiasm; instead they positioned themselves as in-control rather than spontaneous, carefully detailing the ways in which they actively researched and educated themselves about fandom. In turn, this effort would seem to legitimise them as a knowledgeable fan, at the same time as it counters the 'frenzied', shallow fangirl stereotype. Thus, through this analysis it is possible to observe the ways in which narrative performances can be understood as constructed in tension with fangirl stereotypes and balancing the desire to be 'enough', but not 'too much' fangirl.

Having considered becoming-fan accounts, in the final section of the chapter I consider fans' narratives of the self as they reflect on their fannish trajectories as *iCarly* comes to an end. The following discussion illustrates the significance of fandom in youth, how fans might use fandom/fan object generatively as 'symbolic resources' (Zittoun 2006) for self-development and identity exploration, and the meanings young fans attribute to fandom in terms of, and in relation to, their lived experience and development processes.

iCarly Fans Say Goodbye

Transformation Narratives and 'Fandom as Therapy'

While Duffett (2013) suggests that "fandom is a source of personal power that people turn to at different points on their life journey" (138-139), and fans themselves frequently credit fandom with changing their life or supporting their survival through difficult times (Cavicchi 1998; Zittoun 2006), fandom's potential for transformation on a personal, individual level remains under explored in fan scholarship (Zubernis and Larsen 2012). Likewise, although the role of fandom in identity construction and development has been considered (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005), Zubernis and Larsen (2012) suitably suggest the psychoanalytic approaches used in such studies "can be subtly pathologizing" (84).

Acknowledging that a number of fans in the challenge spoke of the turbulent nature of their lives at the time of their fandom, and the ways in which *iCarly*/fandom supported them through this, in this section I draw on Zubernis and Larsen's (2012) work on the 'therapeutic potential of fandom' which is enriched through their use of psychological models. Although as they acknowledge, "the therapeutic potential of fandom exists alongside the propensity for shame" (87), shame does not appear to characterise fans' responses in this challenge; in fact, one fan expressed gratitude for their fellow fans for teaching them that there "isn't anything wrong with having an obsession with something", contrary to their family who were "always making it out to seem as if there is" (**TR13**, 23/11/12). Indeed, Zubernis and Larsen also acknowledge fandom's potentially pedagogical functions: of "validation found in acceptance" (98), and its offering to marginalised people a message (that dominant culture/the non-fannish world largely fails to) that "being you is okay" (Guiltyred cited in ibid, 94). In light of my earlier discussions about the silencing of girls' thoughts and feelings, this message may be particularly poignant for young women. Nevertheless, this is not to say that shame is entirely absent on Tumblr, only that it was not especially evident in the challenge. Rather, entries posted on the final day were more celebratory in nature, not only of *iCarly*/fandom, but of the transformative processes that fandom engendered or supported them through in their own lives. Indeed, more than half the fans noted within their responses what we can call the transformative power of *iCarly*/fandom: the ways in which fandom as a community was experienced as a supportive space, and in some cases the life-changing effects of both the text and the community.

In their chapter 'Fandom as Change Agent', Zubernis and Larsen (2012) focus primarily on fanfiction, considering to what extent and in what way fandom can be considered to offer a form of 'therapy'. Expanding on Sandvoss' work on identity performance, the authors approach fanworks less as a form of self-projection, reflection, and introjection, but as a form of expressive writing which, by offering psychological distance, allows a greater sense of freedom to express and revise themes and perform different identities. Highlighting the communal dimensions of fandom and the supportive community context in which fan works may be produced, Zubernis and Larsen (2012) suggest that:

many of the therapeutic benefits of group counselling are reiterated within the fandom community: catharsis, a sense of universality as fans discover a common sense of difference and subsequent belongingness, and group cohesion as the fandom comes together around a shared passion (86).

Here I consider similar themes and expand on Zubernis and Larsen's notion of 'fandom as therapy' by exploring it in the context of fans' reflections on their fannish experiences. It will also be combined with the work of Tania Zittoun (2006) to consider *iCarly*/fandom as a 'symbolic resource' fans used as both a support in difficult times and in working through developmental transitions in their lives.

'Symbolic Resources' in Developmental Transitions

In order to explore fandom in the context of fans' lived experiences, that is, transition processes and self-development, I draw on Zittoun's (2006) work on young people's use of 'symbolic resources'. Films, music, books, or television can all be 'symbolic resources'; they "are used about *something that does not belong to the cultural experience itself*" (Zittoun 2006, 63). For instance, the "semiotic configurations" of the text, such as the soundtrack of a film, may invoke "traces of embodied experiences", circulating only "in the background of any semiotic process" and composing "soft emotion" that is *"designated by that film"* (ibid, 64). However, once these traces become known, and one is specifically thinking about an event in their own life, they are "addressing that cultural experience *about* something that exceeds its own realization" (ibid). It is the knowledge of these personal meanings, and such use of cultural elements that defines a 'symbolic resource'. In other words, it is a form of 'symbolic bricolage': the collecting of cultural elements that constitute a personal culture, destroying or exceeding existing meanings, and creating new ones with parts of the cultural elements (ibid, 128).

Zittoun (2006) proposes a psychology of using 'symbolic resources' in everyday life, arguing specifically that young people use 'symbolic resources' to support them in the developmental process and in working through transitions and ruptures in their lives, and thus organising psychological development. Young people in particular live through 'transitions' and 'ruptures'. "Transitions imply identity and positioning changes, knowledge acquisition and meaning making" (ibid, 26), while 'ruptures' are those "felt *as such*" (ibid, 102): "an irruption of uncertainty within everyday

experience, which, retrospectively, reveals the degree of certainty that one had in one's spheres of experiences prior to that point of rupture" (ibid, 6). Ruptures may be typical events acknowledged culturally, such as leaving home for university which then lead to processes of transitions, or they may be imposed, less typical, or less expected, such as a bereavement or school bullying. Similar to the way Sandvoss (2005) suggests, "it is not only the fan who shapes her object of fandom, but the object of fandom shapes its fans" (81), Zittoun proposes that the use of 'symbolic resources' can lead to transformation; "good enough processes of change" (26). More than that, Zittoun argues, "The process of moving through a rupture, and creating one's future through the *bricolage* of use of symbolic objects is the core of all human psychology" (x).

In fan studies, work that has considered "how fans might do things with their connections, not simply why they hold them" (Duffett 2013, 116) has often drawn on psychoanalytic theories, for instance the Kleinian model of projection and introjection (Sandvoss 2005), and the Winnicottian concept of the 'transitional object' (Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005). The concept of the 'transitional object' has been criticised for its association with a period of development in childhood, implying then a state of regression when applied to fan interests in adulthood (Sandvoss 2005). Arguably, it may befit a discussion of *iCarly* fans when considering their age, or stage of life, and the transitions that some describe. However, the implication when applied to fans is that the fan object, that is, the 'transitional object' comes to stand in, or compensate for, a 'personal lack'. Conversely, Hills (2002) argues that "all of us, throughout our lives, draw on cultural artifacts as transitional objects" (106), that Winnicott's ideas can suggest that emotional attachments to objects are a way of maintaining good psychological health. While I agree with Hills' sentiment, the implication of a 'personal lack', and Winnicott's framing of emotional attachments within culture as "little madnesses" (cited in Hills 2002, 112) seem to contradict the idea that 'transitional objects' function as a way to maintain good mental health. Rather, it implies that fan-like attachment is "madness" which is thus subtly pathologising. While Winnicottian psychoanalysis may momentarily relieve stereotypes of fandom as passive or duped (Duffett 2013) insofar as "fan cultures are both found and created" (Hills 2002, 113), I argue it does not, *contra* Hills, escape (far enough) from reiterating pathologised fan stereotypes, nor the view of fandom as 'deficient' (ibid).

Thus, when I refer to the idea of 'transition', I intend only to invoke Zittoun's (2006) use of the term.

Duffett (2013) suggests there may be potential, through psychoanalytic accounts, to consider the emotions in fans' lives as a 'boost' rather than a lack, as "*productively added* rather than intrinsically needed" (120). I suggest that Zittoun's psychology of 'symbolic resources' may work some way towards such a consideration. Moreover, it reinstates affect and emotional attachment in academic fan theory, and avoids over-rationalising fan experiences, which for some scholars has been motive for drawing on psychoanalytical theories, but it avoids pathologising fan attachment in ways that psychoanalytical theories may imply.

In what follows, I consider how *iCarly*/fandom was described by fans as relating to their own lives and experiences—as meaningful and productive additions used generatively for support, growth, and self-development during transition processes. Rather than focusing on what fans *do* with the text, in terms of reading and interpretive practices and their making sense of and exploring the fictional world of the show (as I have explored in previous chapters), I focus on how and what fans' *do* with the text/fandom, and what uses *iCarly*/fandom had in relation to the self and identity construction. As Steve Bailey (2005) argues, "the text is not simply an object of interpretive practices in a narrow sense, but also a resource for symbolic integration into a social self" (211). The following is significant in illustrating the important functions that fandom can perform for girls and young women; functions which are too often dismissed, if not entirely overlooked, likely due to assumptions about the nature of their fannish investments based on fangirl stereotypes.

Analysing Goodbye Narratives

Of the forty-five fans participating in the challenge, eighteen posted their goodbyes, with a further seven adding them to their blogs after the finale aired. In response to the request "Say Goodbye To iCarly", fans posted a variety of replies; one wrote a poem and three wrote letters addressed to *iCarly* itself, while the rest more closely resembled that of a journal entry. Yet no matter the structure of their "personal experience narratives" (Cavicchi 1998, 169), common themes ran across them.

Tumblr fans not only appeared to "derive meaning from a shared fan identity" (ibid), but from a shared social identity and lived experience; just as the characters developed on the show that saw them age from thirteen to eighteen, *iCarly*/fandom was a constant across fans' transitions from childhood to adolescence, or adolescence through to young adulthood.

Although each individual fan described an idiosyncratic personal experience, I have organised shared themes into seven categories. These categories were created by a constant comparative method (see Chapter One), based on sentiment expressed, recurrent words, and the ways in which fans positioned themselves in relation to the fan object. The categorisations are as follows: (1) Gratitude: nine fans specifically thanked one or a combination of *iCarly*, the cast (actors and/or characters), the producer, or the fandom; (2) Impossibility and refusal: eight fans noted the impossibility of saying goodbye and two refused to at all; (3) Community and belonging: eight fans described a sense of belonging in fandom and/or acknowledged the friendships they made as a result of their fandom for *iCarly*; (4) Transformation: eight fans indicated that being a fan of *iCarly*—whether watching the show itself or being a part of fandom—was a transformative experience, while one specifically indicated that it was *not* transformative on a personal level, but on the part of one of the characters; (5) Attachment and Longevity: Seven fans suggested that they were deeply attached to *iCarly* and their fandom would remain so long term; (6) Lived Experience: seven fans referred specifically to difficulties in their lived realities and how *iCarly*/fandom helped or supported, changed, or even saved them in some way; (7) Growing up/ becoming: six fans referred to their own or the characters' processes of growing up. In what remains of this chapter I focus specifically on the frequently overlapping and interconnected discourses regarding transition processes and growing up, lived experience and transformation.

In the challenge, fans spoke candidly and emotionally about their own lives and experiences, and about the ways in which they intersected or were interwoven with their fan journeys. Feeling safe or confident enough to share such personal stories was likely influenced by, if not a direct result of, the friendships they referred to, and the sense of belonging that many described. Thus, themes regarding community and belonging will be embedded within the following discussion. While fans' shared

language practices—the mimetic language that performs affect I discussed earlier in the chapter—can be seen to create communal feeling (Baym 1993; Cavicchi 1998), this sense of community, as well as the acceptance of emotionality, seems to have later given rise to the sharing of experiences I discuss here. Nevertheless, these accounts should be equally understood as fan performances or "personal narrative performances" (Scheidt 2006), Shared in the tag, they were "consciously published for a public audience" (Stern 2002, 247), or at least an audience of fellow fans, and this audience "needs to be seen as a construct of the discursive practices utilised and something that is embedded into the narrative through the author's choices during production (Anderson, 1996)" (Scheidt 2006, 194).

Transition Processes and Growing Up

A number of fans reported that *iCarly was* their childhood. For **TR14** (24/11/12), "everyone who was part of this show made my childhood" and they claimed they never stopped watching it, nor outgrew it between the ages of ten and fifteen. In contrast, **TR1** (24/11/12) began by stating that they "didn't grow up with it like a lot of people did", continuing: "I was 19 when it started, and 21 when I started watching it—practically ancient compared to a lot of you". As though perhaps their older age would be considered as lessening their attachment to the show, they continued: "But I still feel like I'm about to lose a major part of my life". For **TR1**, *iCarly* was significant as it introduced them to "the people that I'm going to be friends with for the rest of my life". Thus, while the show may have come to an end, its impact on their life can be understood as potentially on-going into the future and far exceeding the duration of the show. Through fandom, **TR1** had found meaningful and long-lasting relationships. They thanked *iCarly* "for being a constant in my life whenever other things were going haywire", thus suggesting that they found some order or stability through their regular consumption/participation in fandom.

Similarly, **TR15** (23/11/12) began by explaining that *iCarly* was *not* their childhood, but instead " it was there for my transition into (sort of) adulthood. It began in my freshman year of highschool and now I'm halfway through college". *iCarly* was a constant then across a 'rupture': moving to college, a 'symbolic relocation' (Zittoun 2006, 131), and likely a geographical relocation. While **TR1** (24/11/12) described

new friendships they made online as part of their fan experience, for **TR15**, it fortified existing, and generated new, 'offline' relationships:

> even though I'm obviously older than the demographic, it's always been something that I had in common with a lot of my friends. My best friend and I always thought iCarly was the show that was most like our real lives—a lot of crazy fun and not much drama. And it's such a source of great little inside jokes for the two of us and for my boyfriend and I…. And if it weren't for my friend and I quoting Moonlight Twiblood,[116] I wouldn't have accidentally asked out my boyfriend in the first place (it's a long story)…. I am going to cry a lot tonight (**TR15**).

Jokes from *iCarly* became part of the fabric of **TR15**'s lived experience, a way of relating to an existing close friend, and their in-depth knowledge of the show inadvertently sparked a new relationship that may otherwise have not begun. For them, their fandom was able to cross-over into spaces 'outside' Tumblr, in ways that other fans described below could not.

As a 'symbolic object', *iCarly*/fandom had very different uses and held especially different meanings for **TR11** (13/11/12). They described the year they turned fifteen (grade 9), four years prior to posting, as "the hardest year of my life", but every day after school they would watch *iCarly*. It was there for them, to make them laugh, to "ease the pain" on the days of "depression and friendless sobbing". The *iCarly* cast "have always been my babies", they write, and refer to *iCarly* as one of the "hopeful things" in their life that, along with many other things and people, "saved" their life that year. At the time of posting, they were about to embark on a new journey, thinking about the "future and applying to colleges" (university), and they described for them the significance of this coinciding with the end of the show:

> and it's scary as hell, and at the same time my favorite TV show is coming to an end. In a way, it is almost bittersweet, because it is important for me to recognize this chapter of my life, the chapter of depression and struggle, as over, and be able to move on. Maybe I don't need iCarly anymore, because I'm strong enough to stand on my own. Maybe that's why they're finally leaving me. <3 (**TR11**).

iCarly appeared to hold particular significance for **TR11**: it had supported them in difficult times during their final year in junior high school (based on a typical Canadian school system) and was a part of their life until they were able to move on;

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[116] *iCarly*'s parody of *Twilight*.

although perhaps, it was the ending of *iCarly* that helped them recognise, or indeed signify actually, that that particular chapter of their life was in fact over. With the end of a certain chapter in their life, and on the brink of a new one, and coinciding with the end of their "favourite TV show", they used the challenge as a space to reflect on the difficult past and to mark that it was over. Furthermore, through this process they recognised that they no longer needed the support *iCarly* once offered them. Their encounter with *iCarly* was significant in part due to it's linking with a previous 'rupture', that then led to a period of transformation and, it seems, recovery. As a symbolic resource, *iCarly* allowed them to construct meaning, to make sense of their (past) experiences, and both organise and recognise their own personal psychological development over the course of their fandom; that is, recognising that they were no longer the same as they were when they first began watching the show.

Zittoun (2006) argues that 'symbolic resources' can support the "the growth of a time perspective" (19)'; "a personal sense of historicity, related to one's past and childhood and possible selves in the future" that is of particular importance for youth. Living through 'ruptures' alongside their four-year fandom, **TR11** (13/11/12) could "confer meanings to their trajectory" (Zittoun 2006, xiii): organise their past, narrativise their development, and look towards their possible self in the future. "As the narrators of our own life stories, we use the stories to consolidate who we are, script the way we go through life" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 103), and **TR11** narrativised and made sense of their recent history, with their fan experience identified as an important part of their personal script of the ways they had progressed through life during that time. They were not leaving *iCarly*, but *iCarly* was leaving them, but that in itself was poignant or "bittersweet" (**TR11**). Sandvoss (2005) questions whether the relationship between fan and fan object is one of "possession ('mine') or of extension ('me')", arguing that for many it goes beyond possession, becoming instead "an integral part of their identity and vision of self" (163). Although **TR11** indicated a potentially possessive relationship, describing the cast (in notably gendered terms) as their "babies", their fandom was interwoven with their vision of self; it helped chart their development, and it had become an integral part of their identity insofar as they claimed "iCarly saved my life". For that, I imagine, *iCarly* would likely remain an anchor in their personal narrative, a part of their "autobiographical self-construction" (Bailey 2005, 213) for some time.

TR16 (23/11/12) described a similar experience, explaining that *iCarly* "changed" their life, even "saved" their life, and how it was their "one and only escape"; the only place they felt they could turn to and was, in fact, the *only* place they say they did turn to for quite some time. They began watching *iCarly* just as what they describe as the "worst years" of their life began, coinciding with their transition into secondary education that was clearly experienced as a 'rupture': "a massive change for me, and I couldn't deal with it". Although they recognised themselves to be in a "much happier place" than before "entering" fandom, in contrast to **TR11** (13/11/12), they were not ready for *iCarly* to end. Because *iCarly* "is always going to be that show that got me through so, so much", they felt unable to let it go:

> the build up to this finale have [*sic*] shown me that I'll never be able to let go of this show. It is always going to mean so, so much to me. Real life friends don't understand it, and I don't bother explaining—I don't think you understand the feeling of belonging, and home you get in a fandom until you're in one. Even now, coming back into the iCarly fandom on the few occasions I do makes me really feel like I'm coming home, however cheesy the metaphor. (that [*sic*] is a seriously cheesy metaphor.) I grew up with this show. When it started I was an innocent little kid, and now, I'm in my final year of school, and I've grown up a lot […] I really do hope this isn't the end for this fandom. Its hard to keep a fandom alive after the show ends, of course […] Maybe the fandom runs its course, like the show […] Loads of people have been posting this on twitter lately, and I think it sums it up nicely—"you never forget your first fandom." And I am never, ever going to forget mine. (**TR16**)

Feeling "lonely" and "isolated" in their daily school life, fandom offered a sense of belonging, a "home", that **TR16** described as something that only other fans would understand; it was not something they could share with their "real life" friends (in contrast to **TR15** [(23/11/12]). Thus, as much as they were going to miss *iCarly*, it seems likely that they would equally miss the sense of belonging they found in fandom. Indeed, it may be that their hesitancy to say goodbye to *iCarly* was informed by their concern that the fandom they had felt so comfortable in would no longer be there for them. Elizabeth Minkle (2014) suggests that discovering a "supportive space for women and girls", with like-minded others with shared interests and a common identity, can "make a life-changing difference for a person hovering on the margins" (n.p). It seems that while going through difficult times, fandom, and the sense of home

it offered, did make a life-changing difference for **TR16**, and therefore coming to the end of it was especially difficult.

While the idea that fans may choose fandom as a sanctuary has been criticised by Duffett (2013) for the implication that fans are somehow 'lacking', **TR16** seemed to indicate that they did feel a lack—a lack of another place they could turn to for support, for 'escape', and a sense of belonging that they did not experience at school. This lack was not an 'essential' lack, and it need not imply any form of pathology, but may be potentially more reflective of a common experience in "unhappy teenage years" (Zittoun 2006, 133). Moreover, as Zittoun argues:

> young people engaging in some work of transition mobilize various sorts of resources. Some people rely mostly on their own previous practical and emotional experience; some seek dialogue with others to reflect on their actions (Falmagne, 2003); and some, indeed, use symbolic resources. Yet, when they do so, it is often combined with other resources (102).

Zittoun does not seek to account for the ways in which 'symbolic resources' differ from other resources (as Duffett [2013] calls for in relation to fandom), nor positions the use of symbolic resources as more or less valuable than other forms of resources, but instead, takes seriously all cultural experiences, giving people, "especially young people—credit for their choices" (1). More than that, Zittoun argues:

> where modern society, education, or politics do not provide us with the symbolic tools we need to address the issues that life presents us with, we do, in fact, find these by ourselves—we learn to use these movies or books as symbolic resources… in some conditions, such use of symbolic resources are excellent tools to support development (2).

I agree that symbolic resources used in this way can be "excellent tools", and such usage need not be understood as an intrinsic 'lack' or pathologisation. Likewise, if fandom can be considered a form of symbolic resource—Zittoun refers to a virtual fan community as an "external symbolic system" (141)—insofar as it might provide support for generative self-development and offer comfort amidst 'ruptures', then this function of fandom, especially in the lives of young people, demands equal recognition with fans taken seriously and on their own terms.

I agree with Duffett, and Zubernis and Larsen as mentioned above, that absolute care is needed to avoid pathologising fans, no matter how subtly, but I also contend that it is important to recognise the important, potentially therapeutic uses, meanings, and functions that fan objects and fandom itself can hold for fans. These experiences demand recognition to demystify and precisely to 'de-pathologise' their meanings and processes. Finding a 'home' in fandom, or feeling as though a TV show "saved" oneself is not evidence of pathology and should not be feared as such. Rather, symbolic objects and 'external symbolic systems' can be sources of great 'personal power' (Duffett 2013) that perform important functions in youth development, transitions, and ruptures. Moreover, minimising or over-rationalising the significance of fan experiences, such as those described above, not only threatens to empty fandom of the elements that define it: "affect, attachment, passion" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 85), but also misses entirely its therapeutic potential.

Lived Experience, Transformation, and Pedagogical Function

Like **TR11** and **TR16,** a number of fans wrote of the transformational and supportive qualities of fandom, particularly how it changed, or saved their lives. In this context, I recognise that there is potential to overstate these aspects, and inadvertently construct fandom/Tumblr as a utopian-esque safe space. Indeed, the previous chapters have indicated that fandom is not always a safe or welcoming space, but rather is often especially divided and inter-/intra-fandom relations difficult to navigate. However, I also contend that it is important to recognise moments whereby fandom *is* experienced as a supportive environment. In the context of young primarily female fans, and the consistent devaluation and pathologisation of their fandom, I would suggest that this project is even more crucial, precisely as an anti-dote to their stereotyped pathological media representation.

In a recent article for the *New Statesmen*, Minkle (2015) discussed the stark differences between the ways in which adult males' and young females' emotional responses to ruptures in their fandom (Jeremy Clarkson leaving *Top Gear* and Zayn Malik's departure from *One Direction* respectively) were treated by the news media and their readers. Minkle (2015) notes that while the emotionality of grown men passed without much comment, girl fans were met with a barrage of abuse, including

a number of comments on news articles essentially insisting that they were overreacting, that when they "grew up, they'd know what real problems were" (n.p). Minkle (2015) rightly takes issue with such a presumptuous statement and the implication that girls do not have "real world" problems; "that they can't be torn up over a boyband while simultaneously struggling with family troubles or mental or physical illness or poverty or bad relationships or any of the other million things young girls struggle with daily" (n.p). To mock, pathologise, or make light of fannish investment and the important functions that fan objects/fandom can hold for young fans, as a support or as hope and inspiration to keep going, may not only compound already existing struggles but may be even potentially harmful. Moreover, in light of the previous discussions in this chapter and in Chapter Three regarding the silencing of girls' voices and the dismissal/silencing of fangirls' thoughts, feelings and opinions, Minkle's observations seem even more pertinent.

In the challenge, several *iCarly* fans discussed their struggle with "real world" difficulties. **TR13** (23/11/12) spoke with particular candour about the meaningful significance of *iCarly*/fandom to their life. They began first by stating that much thought had gone into their (especially long) post and that writing it was very difficult: "actually crying while writing this". They then continued:

> This show has actually gotten me through some tough times. It was there when I felt like I had no one (still is), it was there when I was being bullied […] And I know maybe it seems dumb that some tv show could do that, but it was. And I don't know if it was the tv show itself, but what resulted out of me watching it. Because of this tv show, this stupid, pointless, show as everyone calls it, I learned about Miranda and Jennette, some of my biggest idols, people who inspire me to go on, even when horrible things are thrown your way every single day. They are some of my biggest role models and I don't know where I'd be if I didn't know about them (**TR13**).

Drawing on their understanding of narrative therapy, Zubernis and Larsen (2012) suggest that constructing personal narratives organises and "gives meaning to experiences" (103). While this is a strong human need generally (ibid), the process of (autobiographical) narrativisation, linked especially to emotional development (Zittoun 2006), is considered especially pertinent for the construction and development of self and identity in late adolescence and young adulthood (Pasupathi and Hoyt 2009). Based on the postmodern concept that the self is fluid, changeable,

and engaged in a process of 'becoming', the process of narrating our own stories is also equally flexible, "opening up the possibility for therapeutic change" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 103). Here, **TR13** gave meaning to their experience as a fan through narrating aspects of their lived experience and the ways in which their fandom, or *iCarly* as a 'symbolic resource', affected their development in the context of "trauma with a small 't'" (ibid, 112) or felt 'ruptures' (Zittoun 2006) (bullying, alienation, anything else that may bring significant pain). That **TR13** spoke of these feelings in the past tense seems to indicate there has been some positive change.

TR13 (23/11/12) suggested that *iCarly* offered them company when they felt lonely, support during painful experiences, and possibly comfort, escape, or protection from the chaos around them. Zittoun (2006) contests that through the distance enabled by "semiotic mediations", 'symbolic resources' allow for "distance toward the immediacy of the here and now" (20), while adolescence itself is "commonly depicted as the experience of the *here-and-now*" (18, original emphasis). It is not clear whether, on one hand, for **TR13** *iCarly* offered them a form of 'optimal distance' that in catharsis theory (Scheff 1979 cited in Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 102) permits distance from distressing emotions, allowing them to "feel safe and in control… terminate the distress before it becomes overwhelming" (ibid). Or, on the other hand, they perhaps related to the characters or recognised themselves in the fan object (Sandvoss 2005). However, their account nevertheless makes clear the meaningful significance and important function(s) that a supposedly "stupid, pointless show" (**TR13**) provided them in their life. Their account also speaks to the potential for personal change and development through fandom, in that they found inspiration "to go on" and could not fathom what or where they would be if they hadn't discovered their "biggest idols" (**TR13**) who perhaps akin to 'role models', represented an idealised form of identity (Stacey 1994).

Reflecting on their development and transformation, **TR9** (23/11/12) constructed a somewhat different narrative of change. **TR9** explained the experience of watching *iCarly* changed their relationships, their relationship to "real life" issues, and their outlook on life:

> This show changed my life in many ways. I would not be where I am today if it hadn't been for iCarly. This one show actually changed my course of thinking, my dreams, and my way on people. I've actually became for [*sic*] happy, more caring, and I learned to ignore what the bullies think (**TR9**).

In reference to developmental psychologist, Paul Harris (2000), Zittoun (2006) states that symbolic play:

> can enrich one's understanding of reality through the test of alternatives, the exploration of possibilities not given *de facto*; they may change ones outlook on the real, thanks to new perspectives that allow the focusing of attention on new aspects of situations (57).

Likewise, **TR9** credited *iCarly* with opening up for them new possibilities through dreaming new dreams. Although they did not elaborate precisely how their thinking changed, they did indicate that they have changed their thinking. This "new system of orientation" (ibid, 138) could well open up new trajectories, with what they learnt, or their new values acquired, being transferred into action (ibid). In fact, they suggested that they have already altered their conduct; they are happier and more caring of others. Illustrative of a pedagogical function, they gave meaning to changes they have experienced; they have learnt to ignore what other people (bullies) think, and thus through fandom, they have potentially gained a greater sense of self, developed greater confidence in their identity, and increased their self-esteem.[117]

For **TR9**, as with many fans in the challenge, it seems fandom was transformative in terms of offering a space in which to explore and become more comfortable in one's identity, and through the support system it can offer. Narrating their journeys through fandom offered fans an opportunity to reflect on their recent histories, trace their personal development, and make sense of their experiences, both fannish and lived, and often in conversation with each other. To conclude this section, I will briefly discuss one fan experience that was an exception to all those examined above for it is illustrative of a telling parallel between fan interpretations of the character Sam, and the transformation processes that fans described on the final day of the challenge. That is, Sam can be understood to have functioned as a form of reciprocal identification whereby fans' (initially) identifying with Sam and (subsequently) her development,

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[117] See also: Zubernis and Larsen (2012, 87).

facilitates, and is reflected in, their own identity development. At the same time, I also draw on this example to highlight fans' active and negotiative meaning-making practices and the communitarian nature of this process.

Character Transformation, Reciprocal Identification, and Negotiated Readings

Contrary to fans discussed above, **TR2** (23/11/12) began their goodbye post with a disclaimer that *iCarly* did *not* change their life or support them:

> I don't think iCarly changed my life. It didn't help me through a rough time in my life or teach me things I didn't already know. That's... just never been how I watched shows or read books. (I watch shows for the characters. And these characters mean a lot to me so I don't know if I'll ever really be able to say goodbye to them).

TR2 contributed the most to the challenge out of all participants, writing over 13,000 words—almost 22% of the total word count of the challenge. In contrast to fans discussed above, their investment in *iCarly* was much more visibly anchored in the fictional world of the text than in its uses in their life and the meanings it held for them in their development or lived experience. That being said, discourses of transformation and self-development can be read in their posts, although rather than being themselves transformed by the text, they described the significance of witnessing Sam's character's growth and transformation:

> It gave me my favourite character in anything ever. I will always love her with all my heart. I got to see her grow up from a bully to someone who protects other people from bullies. I got to see her weak, vulnerable sides along with her strong sides. I got to see that even though she's a little rough around the edges, she has a good heart and loves her friends so much. I got to see her patch things up with the mother that always neglected her and I wish with all my heart we had been able to see her do the same with the sister that she probably feels abandoned her (**TR2** 23/11/12).

Like many others, **TR2** (13/11/12) noted throughout the challenge how "wonderfully developed" Sam was as a character, and detailed the ways in which she had grown and matured throughout the series as a whole. Sam was apparently the favourite character amongst this group of fans, scoring twenty-four out of the thirty votes on favourite character day, and four claiming she was their favourite character of all time from any media. It seems Sam was a primary point of identification as many fans

described the close ways in which they related to her, her vulnerabilities and insecurities, the "walls" she built around her as protection, and her difficult home life and family background.

As briefly referred to in the Introduction, in an article analysing "anti-feminist messages" in TV for young girls, Myers (2013) designated *iCarly* "the most thoroughly saturated with anti-feminist messages, with an average of 11.4 incidents per 22-minute episode" (broadcast every 2–3 minutes), and criticised it for valorising "antisocial" and "badly behaved girls" (198). Although Myers' article appears to be an isolated case, it is worth nothing here to highlight ongoing discrepancies between 'media effects' research that casts girls as passive cultural consumers, and girls' communitarian reception practices (Durham 1999a) whereby they are active meaning makers. For Myers, Sam was considered an example of McRobbie's (2004) category of badly behaved girls: a product of the media's encouragement of bad behaviour that is dressed up as feminist. Not only does Myers's article characterise girls as 'passive recipients' of media 'messages', but it also makes grand claims about this character that both conflict dramatically with fan readings and fail to take into account aspects of the character beyond surface level. In many ways, this would seem to resonate precisely with the ways in which young female fans are stereotyped as uncritical passive consumers, and the ways in which fangirl performances are rarely explored beyond their surface level; instead written off as an affectation with no 'authentic' meaning, an uncontrollable reaction, and often problematically reduced to 'biology' (hormones) or the 'feminine' condition ('hysteria'). In contrast, based on my analysis in this case study, I instead argue that *iCarly* fans are creative producers, actively negotiating and making meaning from the text. Moreover, I argue that the performative nature of emotionality through language reflects agency and control (despite the way in which the language is structured to suggest the opposite), and that such emotionality is not necessarily an affectation or vacuous performance devoid of 'authenticity'. Rather, there may very well be much more behind the squee that relates in significant ways to fans' gendered/generational subjectivities and lived experiences growing up.

In most fan interpretations in the tag, the poor behaviour of Sam was considered symptomatic of the difficulties in her life, and many empathised with her, although

without necessarily condoning her violent outbursts. Despite some negative traits, Sam was greatly admired for her strength and confidence, how fiercely she loves her friends, "how she can swing between a fricking badass and a sweetheart" (**TR4,** 13/11/12), for being unapologetic and "tomboyish" (**TR15,** 14/11/12), and for her "reckless abandon" (**TR17**, 13/11/12). The fans that loved her suggested they could see through her façade; the "thuggish" "anti-social" behaviour Myers describes to the exclusion of anything else. Indeed, Myers characterises Sam in her article by offering a long list of her 'offences': "she hated school, cheated on tests, and refused to do homework. She lied easily and frequently. She stole lunches from kids at school. She had been in 'juvie'... Sam terrorized most people" (200). Fans watched Sam grow over more than a hundred episodes (compared to Myers' twelve), they witnessed "Sam knocking down all her walls" (**TR18,** 21/11/12) and allow herself to admit her feelings and be loved no matter how scary it was. In fact, Sam struggles so much with experiencing strong emotions that, in episode 'iLost My Mind' (4.14), she checks herself in to a psychiatric hospital feeling like she has gone "crazy" because she has feelings for Freddie and is too scared to speak about it. Fans related to Sam and her development over the course of the show, and tended to value her as a comparatively realistic three-dimensional representation of girlhood, than that of Carly's one-dimensionality as a 'Mary Sue' archetype.

My reasons for noting **TR2**'s account and the discrepancies between fan readings and those of Myers are three-fold. Firstly **TR2**'s account is demonstrative that not all fans, *iCarly* fans or otherwise, necessarily relate to fan objects or 'use' them as 'symbolic resources' in the ways this chapter details. This is not to undermine my own argument, but rather to highlight that fans and the meanings of fandom for young people are far from homogenous. Fandom can be a therapeutic, transformative experience, but it is not the only way to relate to a fan object, be a fan, or *the* way one meaningfully participates in fandom. Moreover, this is not to say that for fans such as **TR2**, the self and identity were entirely divorced from their pleasures or that they do not 'do' things with their fannish connections, only that their attachment appeared to constitute different personal meanings for them. Perhaps **TR2** recognised something of themselves in Sam, whether past or present, or identified in some way with Sam's development and felt recognised or acknowledged in their own feelings and experiences. On the other hand, their love for the character may not have been so

closely tied to personal experience at all. Either way, it is not clear from their entries for the challenge, only that they considered their experience watching Sam grow and develop to be "amazing".

Secondly, **TR2**'s entries also indicate that their understanding of the character was far more three-dimensional than that described by Myers. As a community, fans negotiated the meanings of the character; they did not passively accept the character as she appeared on the surface. In relation to psychoanalytic analyses of popular culture, Sandvoss (2005) argues that focusing on the text to the exclusion of fans or spectators offers little to the study of fandom. In the same way, Myers analysis fails to engage with meanings made by audiences, and yet goes on to imply that girls are unable to negotiate or resist ideology by concluding that anti-feminist 'messages' were simply 'received' by girls that watch TV shows such as *iCarly*. More problematically, this is then extrapolated to claim that this uncritical 'receipt' of 'messages' places the future feminist project in jeopardy. Thus, rather than considering girls as active meaning makers, they were "constructed as passive victims of a wholly externalised and all-powerful culture" (Radway 1999 cited in Stern 2002, 227), with the media negatively influencing them and even turning them against feminism. The findings of Myers' study quite clearly conflict with the ways in which *iCarly* fans discussed in this thesis shaped, engaged with, and made meanings from the text of *iCarly*.

Finally, and bringing me to my third point, there are arguably some parallels to be made here between Sam, the qualities that fans identified in this character, and the fans themselves that I have discussed here. Fans in the challenge celebrated Sam precisely because she allowed herself to be vulnerable by acknowledging her feelings. In a patriarchal society in which emotion is devalued for its supposedly 'feminine' nature, and girls and women (particularly young female fans) are pathologised for 'excess' emotion and warned to contain themselves (Douglas 1994)—if not constantly pathologised and policed by cultural commentators/other fans *precisely* in order to attempt to contain/supress them—it seems significant that this character was so loved *because* she grew and changed and developed a voice. Initially, Sam refused, or was unable, to let her feelings show but she grew and developed that she could confront her own vulnerabilities, insecurities and acknowledge her feelings. Equally, as I have

demonstrated in this section, fans shared with each other their personal and emotional experiences, both fannish and the day-to-day, at school, at home, through good days and bad. Like Sam, they appeared to acknowledge and confront difficult feelings, and through this they also recognised their own development, just as they had witnessed in the character. It is in this way that Sam can be potentially understood as a facilitator of identity/emotional development and fans' identification with the character as reciprocal (i.e. corresponding with each other).

As a 'symbolic resource', *iCarly*/fandom was used generatively for positive change and self-development, potentially offering a 'home' in which to be themselves, and support of various natures as they confronted difficulties and 'ruptures' in their lived experiences. Reflecting on their fannish trajectories allowed them to simultaneously reflect on their own development processes, with fandom providing a map on which to chart their journeys, and their fan stories a script to organise and construct personal narratives and give meaning to experiences. Given fans' affective connections—performed through language and self-reflexively described in the challenge—it is also likely of course that *iCarly* ending was itself felt as a rupture.

Conclusion

Sandvoss (2005) states, "conceptualising fans as performers rather than recipients of mediated texts…offers an alternative explanation of the intense emotional pleasures and rewards of fandom" (48). As a whole, this thesis conceptualises fans as performers and fangirl as a performative identity, and explores the different ways that a fangirl identity may be performed. The fan performances examined in this chapter were quite different in nature to those in the previous two chapters. Schneider was not present on Tumblr, as he was in the other two spaces, and fans were less preoccupied with defending their fandom. Fans were taking part in a survey here, reflecting back on their experiences and the series as a whole, and writing and sharing individual posts rather than interacting in a forum. I also suggest that the nature of Tumblr and the lack of a central forum also likely affects the nature of fan performances.

In some ways, the performances here were perhaps less self-conscious, in that they were not thought to be in sight of the producer and they were not embedded in the

context of a 'conflict'; in Chapter Two, relations between fans in the GS were especially fraught following Schneider's arrival and the influx of new members, and in Chapter Three, fans were defending themselves and their pleasures against their pathologised representation in the producerly space of Blogspot. In other ways however, performances were perhaps more self-conscious here as fans were constructing personal narratives that were to be shared with a group, thoughtfully responding to direct questions, and consciously performing their knowledge of and investment in *iCarly* for an assumed (fan) audience.

In the context of my proposal that (fannish corners of) Tumblr may be considered a fangirl space akin to 'virtual bedroom culture' (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 2004), I analysed the performativity of the fangirl in terms of a shared language, specifically a form of 'mimetic language' that can be understood to signify belonging to a community, lay claim to emotional affect, and bring in to being (stereotypical) markers associated with female fans. That Tumblr fans' use such language is significant in its suggestion that although they are most likely aware of the devaluation of their fandom, they do not hide or suppress their emotional responses or affective investment, but create ways primarily through language to represent, communicate, and even exaggerate them. While this may not necessarily be a conscious resistance to fangirl stereotypes, it certainly stands as a critical negotiation, and one with perceptible feminist undertones. Indeed, rather than fighting the stereotype, it can be understood as positively and powerfully recuperating it, inhabiting it even, and hence resisting more specifically 'fangirl as pathology'. In light of the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992) in which they argue girls learn to silence their thoughts and feelings and refrain from expressing them, having come to believe that to do so is potentially dangerous, this seeming acceptance (and performance) of emotion also appears significant in the broader context of girlhood and girls' culture.

Sociologist Michelle Janning (2014) argues, in relation to 'public' performances, that being young and a girl, one is attributed little control: "Young people don't have a loud voice in society, so screaming in this kind of space is a way to have a voice. Literally" (n.p). The same may be said of 'virtual' screams, or fangirl performances of affect online, that it is a way of giving voice to what matters to them, with Tumblr offering a space suitable for flexible identity expression and emotional self-expression.

The performative nature of affect, or 'fangirling', appears to be a central pleasure of fandom, and of being a fan; one that is not necessarily (only) tied to a specific text but to the state of *being* a fan and performing a fannish sensibility online more broadly. In the absence of a defined and contained space such as a message board on LJ, communal articulations of affect and the use of a shared language may be even more salient on Tumblr in order to indicate a shared fannish identity, signify belonging, and create a sense of community.

The example of a becoming-a-fan narrative I discussed allowed for a consideration of the way in which such accounts may be structured to legitimise oneself as a fan. In this way, it not only foregrounded a different kind of fan performance, but it also provided a useful counterpoint to the preceding discussions in its suggestion that Tumblr is not a utopian fangirl space and that fans do not necessarily cease to defend their fandom in the absence of the producer. While this was a purposeful move on my part, these accounts *are* highly performative, they are constructed to perform a 'function' (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 33-34), to 'do something' (Hills 2005c, x), and mindful of the broader cultural context in which fans were responding to the challenge questions, I proposed that what they might 'do' is impression manage (Goffman 1959). Fangirl stereotypes, and insults/dismissals derived from and rooted in them, are pervasive enough that fans in any space may negotiate their position in relation to them. This is not to say that the account I examined was intentionally structured[118] to counter possible assumptions about them based on their fannish identity. Rather, that it was a particular kind of fangirl performance whereby they demonstrated their knowledge of *iCarly* fandom across several online spaces, and thus in this way it can be understood as a bid for legitimacy and a careful balancing of 'too much' and 'not enough'. While there were other examples in the challenge that I could have used to demonstrate these same points, this one was particularly pertinent as it offered an example of the many different paths new fans may take in the transformative process of 'becoming' fan, and highlighted the importance of community in constituting oneself as a fan.

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[118] See: Wetherell and Potter (1987, 34).

In the final section, I then considered the ways in which the fan object and the experience of fandom may 'shape' fans, and how fans might 'do' things with, or as a result of, their affective connections. Drawing on Zubernis and Larsen's (2012) concept of 'fandom as therapy' and considering *iCarly*/fandom as a 'symbolic resource' (Zittoun 2006) offered a productive way in which to explore and theorise the particular significance *iCarly*/fandom appeared to hold for young fans during transition processes, and in the context of 'ruptures' in their lived experiences. Duffett (2013) notes that the psychoanalytical model of introjection affords "a focus on how fans might *do* things with their connections, not simply why they hold them" (116). This model however is used primarily to examine how fans use their role models as 'idealised guides' or versions of the self, and does not seem to account for how fans might 'do' things with their fandom more broadly, particularly in terms of productive self-development, and in the context of their personal lives. I argue that the concept of the 'symbolic object' can work to account for both the 'how' fans might 'do' things with their fan object/fandom, and the 'why' fans might hold affective connections with fan objects/fandom, and in such a way that avoids pathologising both the fan and their affective investment. Zittoun's theory and psychology of 'symbolic resources' would therefore provide a useful addition to future fan studies scholarship that examines the affective dimensions of fandom.

From fans' discussions about Sam, as well as the sheer volume of words dedicated to her in the challenge, it is reasonable to deduce that she was their main point of identification. However, although they wrote at length about the character, and several explicitly stated that they 'related' to her, it was rare for fans to explain *how* they related to/identified with her. Yet, for even those that stated that *iCarly* didn't change their life, it seems that the way in which they most closely related to Sam was through her development, her journey growing up, and learning to voice and take seriously her own experience, thoughts, and feelings. In this way, fans' identification with the character can be understood as reciprocal, with Sam perhaps standing as a facilitator for identity development insofar as, on the final day of the challenge, fans' voiced their own experiences and shared them with the group. This is one of the most significant things these fans can be understood to have 'done' with their affective connections, with *iCarly* as the 'symbolic resource', and fandom the 'external symbolic system' (Zittoun 2006). Not only does this serve to illustrate the important

functions fandom (both object and community) can serve for young female fans, but it also highlights once more that girls are active meaning makers and negotiate these meanings as a community.

Conclusion:
Establishing the Fangirl in Fan Studies

In an article exploring the gendered politics of fandom, Melissa Click (2009) observes:

> Despite three decades of influential feminist research, scholars continue to fight the persistent cultural assumption that male-targeted texts are authentic and interesting, while female-targeted texts are schlocky and mindless—and further that men and boys are active users of media while girls are passive consumers (n.p).

In bringing together fan studies and girls' studies, one of the primary concerns of this thesis has been to continue challenging the cultural assumptions about female-targeted texts and the supposed passivity of girls' consumption. Using *iCarly* fandom as a case study, this thesis has argued for girls as active producers and consumers of media; analysed girls' fan culture from a much-needed gender/age perspective; and highlighted the need to take fangirl identities and performances seriously. In doing so, this thesis has not only drawn attention to the culturally devalued demographic of young female fans, but it has also examined how this already stigmatised demographic negotiate their fandom for a culturally devalued object: tween TV. Given the gendered (female) and age-specific (young/tween) nature of subject and object, both are at risk from judgements of low academic value. Indeed, the scarcity of work focused on girl fans and in this area of children's popular culture would seem to reflect their struggle for legitimacy in academic research. In fan studies in particular, popular objects of girls' fandom, such as TV shows aimed at a young female demographic, are not included in the so-called 'genres' of 'quality' or 'cult' texts that have long comprised the dominant fan studies canon (Duffett 2013; Hills 2007). Thus, this thesis was also concerned with broadening the somewhat narrow-focus of fan studies' favoured fan objects, in addition to diversifying the fan objects that are commonly associated with young female fans (i.e. "pop band[s] or male actor[s]" [Hills 2005b, 804]) by looking beyond pop or celebrity fandom, and contributing to the relatively barren area of scholarship on teen/tween TV fandom.

After the quote above, Click (2009) goes on to cite Driscoll (2002) to emphasise the need for feminist cultural studies scholars to address the "tendency to represent and

discuss girls as conformist rather than resistant or at least to study them almost exclusively with reference to that division" (Driscoll 2002, 11). Whilst I have already cited Driscoll's argument in Chapter One, it is pertinent to draw upon it again as I close this thesis. While fandom may continue to be "over associated" with adolescence (Harrington et al. 2011, 571), finding "its stereotype in the 'hysterical' tweenage or teenage female fan" (Hills 2005b, 804), these fans have been relatively overlooked by fan scholars and these stereotypes largely unchallenged. Since the early 1990s fan scholarship has been centrally preoccupied with discourses of resistance and emphasising fans as active producers, in part, I would argue, to create distance from these fan stereotypes and to challenge the "over" association of fandom with female adolescence.[119] Historically, girls have been characterised as conformist, passive, consumers rather than resistant, active, producers, and thus the dominant discourses informing the field of fan studies would seem to exclude girl fans. Driscoll's words serve to highlight this tension, and encapsulate both the dominant assumptions/discourses I have argued to be underlying fangirls'/girl fans' marginalisation in the field of fan studies. Most crucially, they also underline my argument for how girl fans should be studied, as neither wholly complicit or wholly resistant, here and in future work.

Although this thesis has highlighted that girls are active meaning makers, creative producers and entirely capable of resistance, I have also argued (following Driscoll's [2002] call) that girls are better understood as 'active negotiators' (McRobbie 1993), and girls' negotiative practices should be recognised on their own terms, rather than fitting them into an ill-fitting binary of resistance/conformist (which more often than not finds them lacking). In the same vein, I argued in Chapter Two that fans' self-shaming strategies and their shaming of Others in terms of 'fangirl as pathology' should not be necessarily understood as fangirls' passivity and complicity in their own devaluation. Rather, these practices should be understood as *negotiations* of fangirl stereotypes that perform various functions in different contexts, and further, that they should be reconsidered in the broader context of their stigmatisation as fangirls.

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[119] Both moves would be particularly important however, given that fans, of any age and gender, are feminised and infantalised via their fannish investment and mocked accordingly (Jenkins 1992), and to counter the false idea that fandom is simply an adolescent phase that one must grow out of.

It is these omissions in scholarship and assumptions about girl fans that have structured the interests of, and arguments posed in, this thesis. In concluding, I summarise the themes discussed and developed, and reflect upon key findings across the three spaces and the different implications each of the case studies raise in relation to the questions I set out to investigate. I will also suggest future directions in this area of study.

'Fangirl as Pathology' and the Negotiation of Stereotypes

As previously noted, while some scholars have argued that fan identities are newly normalised and mainstreamed in popular culture, this is not the case for *all* fans. Indeed, I have argued throughout that fangirl stereotypes are both potent and ubiquitous—both within fandom and in popular culture more broadly—and the routine pathologisation of fangirls shows little sign of abating. While Scott (2011) argues that divisions between fans that are and are not 'normalised' or accepted are predominantly structured along gender lines, I contend that the intersection of gender with age/generation creates a further line of division, with the figure of the 'fangirl' epitomising this particular form of inequality. I argue that this has important implications for future work in the field of fan studies; that while gender should remain a critical axis (Scott 2011), intersectionality, and intersections of gender/age particularly, demand wider consideration than is evident in current scholarship. Moreover, as previously stated, fan studies should not only remain concerned with challenging 'fandom as pathology' (Jensen 1992) but more specifically, awaken its concern with '*fangirl* as pathology'. After all, not only is "the stereotyped vision of fandom in circulation in mainstream culture… a force fans [continue to] have to reckon with" (Stanfill 2013, 130), but fangirls arguably carry the greatest burden of negative stereotyping.

In examining tweendom and fan performances across three sites: LiveJournal, Blogspot, and Tumblr, a central concern was to understand the implications of the cultural construction and negative stereotypes of fangirls/girl fans, and the extent to which they come to shape the landscape of young female fandom. A multi-sited study allowed for a complex and in-depth insight into the ways in which fans negotiate fangirl stereotypes; how stereotypes are invoked and for what purposes, how the

'fangirl' label itself is negotiated, and how the term may shift in value and meaning according to the context in which, and to whom, it is applied.

Taken together, this study illustrates the extent to which hierarchical distinctions, and the rhetorical strategies used to mark such distinctions, are reliant upon, constructed through, and informed by notions of 'fangirl as pathology', frequently coalescing around the figure of the fangirl and the stereotypes which characterise them. Tensions and conflicts occurred in *iCarly* fandom for numerous reasons, most notably (as is common in fan cultures), those related to shipping allegiances specifically, and interpretations of the text more broadly. At the centre of disputes, regardless of their topic, were struggles over the nature/depth of fans' investment, authenticity and experience, and behavioural/performance codes of conduct, with 'fangirl' (as stereotype and pathology) functioning as a barometer from which to judge self and Other, and the locus from where most, if not all, dividing hierarchical lines were drawn. While the term 'fangirl' was not commonly and explicitly stated, or used as an insult amidst inter-/intra-fandom conflicts, the Other from whom fans sought to 'disidentify' (Brunsdon 2006) were cast as infantile, overly-invested in (canon-sanctioned) shipping/romance, overly-obsessed, 'entitled', loud, and 'crazy'. These characterisations of the Other, and the language used to define the Other, would seem to strongly invoke fangirl stereotypes and draw on notions of 'fangirl as pathology'.

In Chapter Two, I questioned how a fangirl, or group of fangirls might distinguish themselves from another, and what a fangirl hierarchy might look like. If they are all equally subject to discrimination based on their age, gender, and the ways in which they perform their fandom, I was concerned with examining how one would elevate themselves above a (similar) other and seek to escape (as far as it is ever possible) such judgement. Noting that work on distinction, such as that of Thornton (1995) (building on Bourdieu [1984]), tend to consider 'imagined others' with objective differences *outside* the community or subculture concerned, Hills (2002) questions how we can theorise the construction of an 'imagined other' *within* a fan culture and the "fine-grained moral dualisms" upon which distinctions are cast (61). With no great 'objective' differences in terms of gender, generation, or culture, Hills draws on Freud to refer to these as the "narcissism of minor differences" (ibid). While this terminology is not ideal due to negative connotations attached to the term 'narcissism',

the concept is useful in indicating that distinctions can be constructed "in terms of legitimating one's own cultural practices against imagined others whose very cultural proximity also threatens the project of distinction" (ibid). The distinctions cast between fans in "cultural proximity" (ibid), within and outside the Groovy Smoothie (GS) (although still within the same fan culture in a broad sense) were both finely-grained and particularly unstable. "Subjectifying differences" (ibid) in the absence of clear objective differences relied on the construction of a fine line whereby the Other was judged to be 'too much' 'fangirl' and performing 'too close' to stereotype; displaying (stereotypical) markers of age and gender related to adolescent girls, and those more specifically related to cultural constructions of adolescent girls' as fans, and devalued/pathologised accordingly.

In the GS, fangirl stereotypes were knowingly repurposed to fans' own advantage, but their usage performed several different functions. Pre-Schneider, the GS was marked as a fangirl-friendly space and one could self-identify as a fangirl and label their performances as such. In doing so, one could indicate they were performing in accordance with the community guidelines, demonstrate belonging and hence gain community approval and fangirl capital. In inter-fandom, self-identifying as "crazy" or "rabid" was used as a positive marker of distinction, intended to elevate GS fans above those considered 'lacking'. Such language was used to signify particular reading strategies and so-called fangirl modes of engagement that were considered more fannish, subversive, or 'transformational', than fans elsewhere perceived to be more 'mainstream', conventional, or 'affirmational'. In the presence of a "normal" (Goffman 1963) or a non-stigmatised person (i.e. Schneider), and in anticipation of shame, negative stereotypes and pathologised language were then applied to the self as a strategy of shaming oneself before an Other has the opportunity to judge or cast shame on them. Later, in inter-fandom and intra-fandom distinctions, GS fans distanced themselves from negative Others and renegotiated the fangirl label and its associated language as part of a strategy of boundary maintenance. With an identified/imagined negative Other in close proximity—those exhibiting disruptive entitled behaviours or with differing interests in the text and the community— pathologising language was tempered in relation to the self and solely cast on to Others.

My analysis in Chapter Two thus reveals a complex series of negotiations involved in performing and claiming a fangirl identity whereby the term shifts in meaning and value according to purpose/intention, context, audience, and who is claiming or being labelled with the term. In the Introduction, I noted the dichotomous nature of the term 'fangirl', that it can be used in both a playful and a derogatory sense, and that to differing degrees, both definitions of the term can be seen operating in each of the three spaces. Williams (2011a) has made a similar observation of the term, arguing that 'fangirl' has "always been open to contestation and ambiguity with many fans operating a dual usage of the label" (175-6). Broadly, this appears to remains the case, however, Chapter Two illustrates that it is not (always) a simple mechanism of claiming the positive or playful definition for the self and assigning the negative and derogatory definition to others.

Focusing on fans' in-text representation in *iCarly* in Chapter Three serves to reinforce the argument that particular groups of fans (read: young and female) remain distinctly pathologised in mainstream culture. It also illustrates some of the ways in which TPTB may seek to discipline 'unruly' fans participating in unsanctioned (read: fangirl modes) fannish practices, and attempt to 'educate' fans on the 'correct' ways to read and enjoy the show. I argued that Schneider's blog post can be understood as a form of reintegrative shaming: a tactic designed to avoid alienating the 'offender' by 'lovingly' shaming them into compliance and miminise the risk of 'reoffending'. Yet not all fans appeared reintegrated, nor accepted their shaming. Some denied the 'impurity' existed at all and criticised the predictable, stereotypical, and pathologised representation, while others accepted the shaming as valid (indeed took on the role of disciplinarian) and shifted it on to others.

While fans in the GS sought to reclaim their space and resist the shifts in community discourse that Schneider's (omni)presence had wrought, opportunities to resist and to be heard were especially limited, or even prevented, in the producerly space of Blogspot. Not only were critical fan comments deleted, but those that expressed their complaints were deemed by some fans to be 'proof' that the representation was valid, that these fans needed disciplining, but were untamable. It is in this context that I argued that challenging the pathologisation of fangirls, *as* fangirls is potentially fraught with difficulty. Firstly, the sheer persistence of fangirl stereotypes can be

understood as disempowering—to speak up, criticise, and contest one's own devaluation may be perceived by others, as it was by some BS fans, to lend further credence to the unruly, disruptive fangirl stereotype. Thus, those that wish to do so may silence themselves to escape such accusations. It is also possible that many would not voice their opinions (particularly in an official space) given that young women are systematically silenced and denied a voice in (patriarchal) society (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Janning 2014; Stern 2002), and taught that their opinions do not matter.

Secondly, fangirl stereotypes, and the underlying age-specific brand of misogyny they are rooted in, can be understood to pre-emptively silence girl fans. That is, fangirls' thoughts, feelings, voices, and their complaints and challenges to their own construction may be easily disregarded as trivial, and likely go unheard (by TPTB) on the basis that they are, or perceived to be, 'just' teenage girls. Of course, not being heard, but rather only dismissed further, reinforces the fallacy that girls' opinions do not matter. It also reflects the ways in which, as Busse (2013) has similarly argued, their fannish love is only welcomed within certain remits (e.g. free-labour, purchasing power, website clicks), but not when it becomes ('overly'-)emotionally-driven and crosses over into 'hysterical' territory, and certainly not when fans' resist or challenge TPTB. It appears then as a self-reinforcing cycle and it is in this way that I argued that the need to study girls outside binaries of resistant/conformist is once more highlighted since it is insufficient in accounting for the complexities of fangirls' experiences in the context of their marginalised position.

In studying girl fans it is particularly important to consider imbalances of power (not least in the context of fan/producer relationships) and more fully account for the structural inequalities that come with being young and female. Equally crucial, girls' challenges to their own devaluation (or relative lack thereof) and internalisation of negative external discourses of female fandom demand reconsideration in light of their stigmatisation and already marginalised position. That is to say that, as a stigmatised group, the imperative to distance oneself from negative stereotypes and cast them on to others—'redeploying' "the discourses that the dominant culture mobilized against them" (Stanfill 2013, 128) (such as pathologising language), may be particularly strong. Thus, strategies of shaming the Other, often functioning as a self-

legitimisation strategy, need not be simply understood as fangirls' complicity in their own discrimination/devaluation, but would be better understood as a product of their devalued and stigmatised position. Likewise, in Chapter Two, I suggested that the prevalence of self-shaming, often masquerading as a defence strategy, should be understood in the same way.[120] Drawing on Goffman's (1963) work on stigma was useful in theorising the strategies of stigmatised people in relation to their fellow stigmatised people and accounting for the impact that the presence of a non-stigmatised person may have in the group. Given the continued stigmatisation of fans, and fangirls in particular, Goffman's theories, and work by sociologists, such as that discussed by Stanfill (2013), that considers "how subgroups form their identities in relation to the dominant culture" (121) should be more fully integrated in fan studies approaches. This may be especially pertinent in the context of the blurring boundaries between fans and TPTB via their 'meeting' on social media, and given that both Chapters Two and Three illustrate the ways in which Schneider, as non-stigmatised, seemed to function as a catalyst for inter-/intra-fandom distinctions, and heighten the need to distance oneself from negative stereotypes.

The analysis in Chapter Four of fans' negotiations of stereotypes and negative discourses yields some different findings. The data gathered for this chapter was situated in a very different context whereby the producer was absent, fans were reflecting on their personal experiences as fans, and answering a series of questions for a fan-created survey. Analysing fans' linguistic performances, I argued that rather than distancing themselves from dominant representations of fangirls—precisely those that are routinely mocked and devalued—they instead emphasised fannish affect and reified, through 'mimetic language', the embodied performance of the fangirl archetype. Through such language, fans could demonstrate their belonging, as it functions as a form of esoteric knowledge, as well as lay claim to a fangirl identity, by performing their affect and fannish investment. Moreover, I proposed that performative 'mimetic language' can be understood as a form of feminist resistance to the feminisation and devaluation of emotion. Rather than resisting the stereotype by

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[120] Given the pervasiveness of shaming (self and Other), it could be argued that it becomes an intrinsic part of a fangirl performance—perhaps even functioning to make clear to others that one is aware of the nature of their own performances and the community's standards/boundaries of what is considered inappropriate, precisely to thwart one's own shaming by others. However, I am reluctant to wholly situate these practices within the terms of performance, at least without considering overarching power structures of gender and age, and girls' marginalised position within this context.

countering it (evacuating their performances from emotion and enacting 'rational distance'), emotions/emotional expression were reclaimed and attributed power, such that it was an integral part of engaging in, and demonstrating one's belonging in, the community. In this way, I argue that 'fangirl' was positively recuperated and 'fangirl as pathology' challenged, if not resisted. In the broader context of girlhood this may be particularly pertinent given that scholars have argued girls learn to silence their thoughts and feelings, fearing it may be risky to express them (Brown and Gilligan 1992).

Through mimetic language, fans can be understood to display a desire for "communal validation" (Nash and Lahti 1999, 83), and seek to demonstrate their "authentic belonging" (Kanai 2015, n.p). Yet, I argued there still exists an imperative to maintain individual agency, to perform "authentic individuality" (ibid), and avoid appearing in ways that align with undesirable aspects of the fangirl stereotype, that is, the conformist fangirl that follows the crowd. Fans' accounts written for the Tumblr challenge were highly performative and self-conscious, and accordingly I suggested that these should be understood to be constructed in tension with cultural stereotypes of the 'fangirl', specifically exemplifying the desire to be 'enough' 'fangirl', but not 'too much', or too negatively 'fangirl'. Thus, while I proposed that Tumblr can be understood as a bedroom space, one in which fangirl performances are accepted, celebrated, even a requirement for reception into a community (notbecauseofvictories 2013) and meaningful participation/belonging thereafter, fandom can still be seen to offer girls "ambivalent pleasures" (Nash and Lahti 1999, 83).

In Chapters Two and Three, fans engaged in self-policing and defence and legitimisation strategies under Schneider's surveillance and in anticipation of, or in response to, their shaming. Yet, even when a potential judge is not present (as on Tumblr), within the broader cultural context in which fangirls are mocked and pathologised, fans remain likely to self-police, to negotiate their performances in relation to their dominant (stereotypical) representation (Stanfill 2013), and to impression manage (Goffman 1959). Even in a fangirl supportive space, which Tumblr can be seen to offer to some extent, the politics of being/performing as a fangirl are still not without careful negotiation. Fans may "feel the need to (at least try to) insulate themselves from the mainstream contempt for their desires… seek out…

validation…*because* it is so pointedly lacking elsewhere" (Nash and Lahti 1999, 80). Yet, while a sense of community and peer-validation is possible to gain, I am not convinced complete respite is easily found while the negative cultural construction of fangirls remains in heavy circulation. One must still balance their performance somewhere between appearing 'too much' and 'not enough'; only the dividing line is blurry and appears to shift from one platform to another.

Affective Connections and Generational Identification

While defence and legitimisation strategies may be a common feature of fan performances, regardless of age and/or gender, they certainly appeared to shape the landscape of tweendom. Aside from the age and gender of the fans and the producer's presence, the apparent need to defend/legitimise oneself may have been heightened due to the fan object. Indeed, fans in each of the three spaces legitimised their interest in *iCarly* by suggesting that the show was 'more' than a tween show and/or referenced their age and past experiences as tweens/teens as an important factor in their understanding and interpretations of the text. Thus, even the nature of fans' identification with, and pleasures in, *iCarly*/tweendom were implicated in defence and legitimisation strategies.

In each of the three case studies, the ways in which fans appeared to relate to the show were closely linked to their own gendered and generational subjectivities, although the nature of fans' identifications were different between spaces. Fans in the GS identified themselves as distinctly older than the tween target audience, and clearly marked their community as a space for older and more mature fans to discuss the adult-natured elements of the show. GS fans' pleasures in the text were quite firmly located at the level of subtext, their reading and interpretive strategies employed to tease out the sexual innuendo they considered evident, and potentially included in the narrative in order to appeal to an older viewer such as themselves. Crucially, by locating such content in the show, rather than (only) a product of their reading(s), they were able to distance themselves from accusations that they were "sad fangirls" reading 'too much' into, and inappropriately 'ageing up', the text (at least pre-Schneider).

Being an older viewer was considered a benefit more often than it was positioned as a source of potential shame; their generational subjectivities furthered their enjoyment of the show and the shared sense of being 'outside' the target demographic was considered by some to heighten their pleasure in the tweendom community. Rather than a source of frustration, the apparent 'textual gaps' in the tween sitcom were perceived as extended "narrative territory" (Scott 2007b) which older fans could fill with their own voices and stories of young adolescence; the sorts of stories that were considered beyond what tween sitcoms like *iCarly* are likely to present to the target demographic. In contrast, fans commenting on Blogspot spoke of a desire for the show to be reflective of their own teenage lives and experiences. Rather than filling in the gaps left by the text, as fans in the GS enjoyed, BS fans appeared frustrated that the characters and their relationships were not being adequately developed in canon.

While Schneider, via the iCarly trio, demanded that *iCarly* was a comedy and *not* about relationships, many fans claimed they were *only* interested in character development and potential romance. Drawing on their own experiences, several argued that navigating romantic relationships are a key part of growing up, and thus to deny these of the characters was to deny them the opportunity to develop realistically and undesirably 'sanitise' the text. Moreover, BS fans defended their unsanctioned interests and intense feelings about ships by explaining that they had grown up with the show and therefore felt deeply for the characters. Thus their interest was not merely arbitrary but based on established affective connections with the characters, and their shipping desires a by-product of their investment in the show over time. In other words, they were not simply 'shallow' fangirls, but their demand for romance narratives was driven by a desire to identify with the show; to have it reflect their own experiences as young, but maturing people.

The nature of Tumblr fans' identifications discussed in Chapter Four arguably sit somewhere in between those described above. Tumblr fans did not so frequently focus on the gaps left by the show, whether as a source of frustration or pleasure. On one hand, this is perhaps surprising, given that there was only one episode left at the time of the challenge, and one would perhaps imagine that fans' might reflect on what was left to resolve in the ultimate episode. On the other hand, fans were approaching the text as a near-complete production and seemed to have already constructed a narrative

across the five seasons themselves (arguably through collaborative interpretation given the consistent nature of readings across accounts) that closed any perceived 'gaps'. Across the many contributions to the countdown challenge, fans claimed to relate to, or identify closely, with Sam, yet rarely elaborated on why they felt such an affinity. Nevertheless, that they spoke so frequently about the character's development, and the ways in which she was seen learning to cope with difficulties in her life and giving voice to her own thoughts and feelings suggests that they identified in some way with Sam's journey and her struggles growing up girl.

In focusing on Tumblr fans' goodbye narratives I considered fans' own transformative journeys, growing up with *iCarly*/fandom, and in what ways being a fan and participating in fandom can perform important functions in the context of fans' lived experiences, specifically in youth development, transitions, and ruptures. While a fan object/fandom may hold as a symbolic resource/external symbolic system (Zittoun 2006) that can be used generatively and therapeutically for fans of any age, these functions tend to be particularly overlooked within a broader context in which girls' fandom and fannish affect is trivialised. For some fans taking part in the challenge, being a fan and participating in fandom appeared to be of great importance for a myriad of reasons, including its offer of hope, support, a sense of belonging, and meeting like-minded others. As noted in Chapter Two, several scholars have argued that feminist analyses of fandom have overemphasised the communal, supportive, nurturing aspects of female fan communities and thereby overlooked the ways in which fandom is structured by conflicts, tensions, and hierarchies. Whilst maintaining a critical feminist edge, this thesis has focused much on hierarchical distinctions, inter-/intra-fandom tensions and the conflicts that arose between fans, as well as between fans and the producer. However, I also consider it important to acknowledge that fandom can be experienced as a supportive, therapeutic environment, one of significant importance for some girls as they grow up, from tween to teen, from teen to young adult. Girls' fannish 'squee' is so often dismissed as an affectation, a vacuous performance devoid of 'authenticity', but as fans intertwine the text with the reality of their own lives, the experience of having 'feels' may not be entirely divorced from feelings related to one's lived experience.

Future Fangirls: Where Next?

This study presented a non-participatory observational analysis study of fangirls online. I have not intended, attempted nor claimed to speak on behalf of the fans studied in this research. I have analysed these fans as performers and fan discourse as text—as "discourses people produce" (Ang 1985, 11)—that are constructed to 'do something' (Hills 2005c, x; Wetherell and Potter 1987, 32). Whilst I was concerned with examining 'naturally occurring' fan talk in order to explore the ways in which fangirl stereotypes were negotiated without intervention (i.e. an ethnographic approach), it was nevertheless important to remain aware of the performative aspect of supposedly 'naturally occurring' talk. Fan-fan interaction still constitutes a performance; any comments posted are consciously published for others' consumption regardless of how public or private the space in which they are posting is perceived. Thus, fan comments online could not be taken entirely at face value (Crowther 1999; Hills 2002) but should be understood to perform particular functions, manage or create impressions, and to construct meanings. Whilst I suggest that the methodological approaches taken in this research were useful, I cannot know what these fans' opinions of fangirl stereotypes are, how and why exactly they negotiate them, if they consciously do. This is of course the limitation of non-participatory observational analysis. Having not spoken directly with these fans I can only argue in what ways they can be understood to be negotiating stereotypes, defending and legitimising their fandom, and identifying themselves as fangirls through analysing their 'enunciative productivity' (Fiske 1992).

Indeed, it was not always clear whether or not *iCarly* fans studied here identified themselves as a 'fangirl', and whether they embraced it or rejected it, on what basis, and why that might be. As Karen Healey (2009) noted in her study on negotiations of 'fangirl', some fans rejected it as they argued it did not apply to them, some attempted to positively reclaim it but neutralise it, and others feared rejecting it for it might be misconstrued as "a problematic rejection of the 'feminine' in favor of more patriarchy-approved methods of reading and responding" to the fan object (160). One way to make sense of the variations in meanings/value of the term, and contradictions in use of the fangirl label that I have discussed here, would be to carry out research with young female fans and more directly ask them how they negotiate the term. Moreover, in future work, it would be significant to speak with girl fans and consider

how they respond to their dominant representations in popular culture and how fangirl stereotypes may, or may not, influence how they perform their fandom online and accordingly perceive themselves and those in their fan communities as fan[girl]s. Nevertheless, while the "ethnographic process of 'asking the audience" (Hills 2002, 66) may further insights into the negotiation of fangirl stereotypes, such fan-talk still cannot be accepted as "cultural facts by ethnographers" (ibid, 65) or taken as "evidence of fan knowledge" (ibid, 66). It must always be subject to further interpretation and analysis.

Finally, given my discussion of the gendering of emotion in relation to a (potentially) feminist reclamation of emotion in Chapter Four, empirical work on fangirls/girl fans could also interrogate this further, locating it within the context of 'social media feminism'.[121] While emotional (fannish) expression is widely accepted, if not seen to be of critical importance, in the fannish corners of Tumblr, fangirl policing and (imperceptible) lines of 'too much' and 'not enough' nevertheless remain prevalent and thus a study of how these lines are negotiated would be pertinent for both feminist girls' studies and fan studies. Indeed, I contend that bringing together girls' studies, fans studies, and the social sciences (psychology and sociology in particular) could yield valuable insights into the politics of being/performing as a fangirl. In particular, interdisciplinary studies of fans could further examine how 'fangirl politics' intersect with age/gender inequalities and the ways in which girls and young women navigate their marginalised position, even in spaces such as fan communities, in which one would think there might be respite from stigmatisation and structural inequalities. As Dafna Lemish (2010) reminds us, the internet is "a site of gender domination as well as power struggle" (x) and when exploring its role in girls' lives, it should always "[involve] dissecting the interwoven inequalities brought about not only by gender... but also age hierarchies so prevalent in our respective societies" (ibid, x-xi). As a distinctly marginalised group, I argue these considerations are especially crucial and should hold a central place when studying fangirls/girl fans. By more fully accounting for these issues, I would hope that future studies of girl fans can also continue to move beyond reductive characterisations of girls as uncritical, passive and conformist and—

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[121] There are various terms used to describe the current state of feminism and the ways in which social media has 'revitalised' or expanded the movement, such as 'hashtag feminism', 'networked feminism', 'fourth wave feminism', and 'Tumblr feminism'.

in stepping outside of a binary logic—consider resistance as a continuum in order to account for girls' negotiative practices.

This study of tweendom online has sought to establish a space in fan studies for girl fans/fangirls, one that was not clearly evident in current scholarship, at least in part due to the conflict between these characterisations and the dominant themes of the field. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, it has worked to challenge and interrogate the easily visualised, pathologised, stereotype of the 'hysterical' fangirl so persistent in media images, and contributed to an emerging body of work which seeks to take young female fans and the objects of their fannish affections seriously.

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